Historical accuracy in costume design:  
Experiences and perceptions of Broadway costume designers

by

Sara Jablon

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Apparel, Merchandising, and Design

Program of Study Committee:
Eulanda A. Sanders, Major Professor
Fatma Baytar
Mary Lynn Damhorst
Brad Dell
John W. Monroe

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2016

Copyright © Sara Jablon, 2016. All rights reserved.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................... v
LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................... vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..................................................................................................... vii
ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................... viii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ............................................................................... 1
  Background ...................................................................................................................... 1
  Purpose ............................................................................................................................. 4
  Significance ....................................................................................................................... 4
  Research Questions ......................................................................................................... 5
  Objectives .......................................................................................................................... 5
  Scope ................................................................................................................................ 6
  The Role of the Researcher ............................................................................................... 6
  Limitations ......................................................................................................................... 7
  Definitions of Terms ......................................................................................................... 7

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................... 10
  Stage Costumes ............................................................................................................... 10
    Definition of Costume .................................................................................................. 10
    Taxonomies of Costumes ............................................................................................. 13
  History of Theatrical Costume Design ............................................................................... 16
  Historical Accuracy in Costume Design ........................................................................... 18
  Arguments Against Historical Accuracy .......................................................................... 22
  Contemporary Approaches to Historical Costume Design ............................................. 29
  Theoretical Perspectives of the Communicative Properties of Appearance .................. 34
    Semiotics ....................................................................................................................... 37
    Symbolic Interactionism .............................................................................................. 42
    Dramaturgy .................................................................................................................. 46
    Impression Formation ................................................................................................. 49
  Grounded Theory ............................................................................................................. 53
  Gaps in the Literature ...................................................................................................... 56

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS ............................................................................... 63
  Research Design ............................................................................................................. 63
  Participants ....................................................................................................................... 64
  Data Collection ............................................................................................................... 65
  Data Analysis ................................................................................................................... 68
  Trustworthiness ............................................................................................................... 72
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Profile of Participants ............................................. 76
Definition of Historical Accuracy .................................... 78
Dress ........................................................................ 80
The Body ...................................................................... 82
Importance of Historical Accuracy .................................... 86
The Importance of History ............................................. 86
The Primacy of the Narrative ......................................... 87
Conditionality of Accuracy ............................................. 88
The beneficiality of accuracy ......................................... 89
The responsibility of accuracy ....................................... 90
The impossibility of accuracy ....................................... 92
Approach to Historically Set Productions ....................... 94
Production Factors Influencing Historical Accuracy .......... 94
Applicability .............................................................. 95
Production aesthetics ................................................. 95
The theatrical framework ........................................... 95
The text ...................................................................... 99
The production concept ............................................. 100
The scenic design ..................................................... 101
Cultural aesthetics ..................................................... 103
Attainability ............................................................. 107
Resources .................................................................... 108
The historically accurate body .................................... 110
Performability .......................................................... 112
Strategies for Incorporating Historical Accuracy .............. 114
Incubation ............................................................... 115
Research ...................................................................... 115
Textual research ....................................................... 116
Visual research ........................................................ 117
Artifactual research ................................................... 118
Role-playing ............................................................. 120
The characters ........................................................ 120
The audience .......................................................... 121
The director ............................................................ 122
The performers ......................................................... 123
Historical manipulation ............................................. 123
Historical Accuracy Continuum .................................... 126
Designer Factors ....................................................... 129

CHAPTER FIVE: MODEL AND DISCUSSION ........................................ 132
Conceptual Model ....................................................... 132
Theoretical Implications ............................................. 135
Dramaturgy ................................................................ 135
Symbolic Interactionism ............................................ 138
Semiotics ................................................................. 141
Grounded Substantive Theory ................................................................. 148
William Ivey Long and *The Lost Colony* .................................................. 150
Ann Roth and *The Seagull* ...................................................................... 152
Anita Yavich and *Henry V* ................................................................. 153

**CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION** .................................................................. 155
- Summary .......................................................................................... 155
- Implications ..................................................................................... 159
- Future Research ............................................................................. 160

**APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER** ..................................................... 165
**APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER** ............................ 166
**APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT** ................................. 167
**APPENDIX D: FACE SHEET** .......................................................... 170
**APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL** ................................................ 171
**APPENDIX F: CODING GUIDE** .......................................................... 174
**APPENDIX G: PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES** ....................................... 178
**REFERENCES** .................................................................................. 181
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Jakobson's (1960) model of communication ......................................................... 34
Figure 2. Hillestad's (1980) appearance model ................................................................. 79
Figure 3. The importance of historical accuracy ................................................................. 86
Figure 4. Production factors ............................................................................................... 95
Figure 5. Design strategies ............................................................................................... 115
Figure 6. Production factors and design strategies ........................................................... 127
Figure 7. Continuum of historical accuracy ....................................................................... 128
Figure 8. Model of the costume designer’s approach to a historically set production. ........ 133
Figure 9. Adaptation of Jakobson's (1960) communication model ................................... 142
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Description of participants........................................................................................................ 77
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study would not have been possible without the contributions of so many people. My thanks especially to Barbara Cokorinos for providing access, assistance, guidance, and suggestions in terms of the participant pool. In addition, this research was made possible, in part, through a fellowship grant from the United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT) Grants & Fellowship Program. And of course I am profoundly grateful for the costume designers who shared their time, experiences, and perceptions with me.

Committing to a career in academia took quite a change in mindset. It has been my privilege to navigate the transition with the wonderful members of my committee: Fatma Baytar, Mary Lynn Damhorst, Brad Dell, John W. Monroe, and the inimitable Eulanda A. Sanders. Her mentorship has provided me with a strong foundation from which to launch my career and the confidence to see it as achievable.

Thank you to my editors, reviewers, and idea-bouncers for your fresh eyes, astute questions, and insightful thoughts: Ashley Garrin, Meghan Healey, Arienne McCracken, Jeremy Roberts, Kelly Schaefer, Pamela Snyder-Gallagher, and my mother Lisa Simon Jablon.

Finally, my heartfelt gratitude to my friends and family for supporting me unconditionally. It is my honor to do the same for you.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to systematically explore one aspect of costume design, the role of historical accuracy in American theater, according to contemporary Broadway costume designers. Using grounded theory methodology, this study investigated the characteristics Broadway costume designers believe are essential for historical accuracy in costume design; the significance they place on historical accuracy for the success of the costume design; and how they approach and incorporate history into their costume designs of historically set productions. Sixteen Broadway costume designers were interviewed for this study. Based on the analysis of interview responses and guided by Hillestad’s (1980) appearance model, an operational definition for historical accuracy in costume design was developed:

A historically accurate costume is one in which historically accurate articles made using historically accurate materials and processes are assembled about a historically accurate body.

Several points about historical accuracy in costume design were widely acknowledged: (a) the presentation of history on stage is essential to theater’s mission of communicating with the audience; (b) the narrative takes precedence over historical accuracy; and (c) the importance of historical accuracy is conditional, dependent on production factors grouped into three classifications: applicability, attainability, and performability. Consideration of these factors leads to the iterative strategies in a costume designer’s approach to a historically set production. These strategies are incubation, research, role-playing, and historical manipulation. This final strategy, in addition to the designer’s personal inclination towards historical accuracy, results in a design that can then be situated on a historical accuracy continuum between artifact and invention. The factors, designer
inclination, and design strategies are illustrated in the model of the creative process of incorporating history into theatrical costume design.

Stemming from development of the model and further analysis of the data, a substantive grounded theory and its corollary were derived:

The higher designer inclination towards historical accuracy and the more favorable the production factors (i.e., applicability, attainability, and performability), the closer costumes will be situated to artifact on the historical accuracy continuum.

The lower designer inclination towards historical accuracy, regardless of the production factors, the closer costumes will be situated to invention on the historical accuracy continuum.

The model and theory emerged from the study’s data, but the theoretical perspectives of dramaturgy, symbolic interactionism, and semiotics were utilized to aid in explaining these results. This research sought to provide a framework for evaluating the importance of historical accuracy in costume design and a tool to guide novice designers facing historically set productions. Thus this study contributes to the scholarship of both the costume and apparel fields and forges connections between them.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

In the United States, Broadway is often considered the pinnacle of theatrical success. More than 13.1 million people paid $1.354 billion to see a Broadway show in 2015 (“Broadway,” 2016) and in April of 2016, 39 of Broadway’s 40 theaters were in use (“Listings,” 2016). Of those 39 productions, 25 were set in historical periods ranging from the sixteenth century for Something Rotten! to the 1980s, when American Psycho takes place. The other productions were contemporary, like Kinky Boots, or fantasy, such as The Lion King or Wicked. Hundreds of performers appear on stage in those productions, each wearing any number of costumes artistically and thoughtfully created by a costume designer.

Every production, on Broadway or off— as well as every film, television show, opera, dance piece, advertisement, web series, and computer game— has a costume designer, a person who is responsible for the appearance of every person in view of the audience. Hillestad (1980) defined appearance as the “total concept” of “the human body as well as the coverings and embellishments placed upon it” (p. 117), and in fact, each of these elements is of the utmost importance to costume designers.

---

1 In theatrical parlance, a production is the unique staging of a theatrical piece (i.e., a play or musical) while a show is an individual performance of that production. The same piece may have many productions over time.
3 There are more than 50 performers in the Broadway production of The Lion King, for instance, and several cast members wear ten individual costumes. Production Wardrobe Supervisor Kjeld Andersen estimated that 190 different costumes appear onstage each show (personal communication, March 11, 2015).
In Western theater, one of the fundamental objectives of a costume is to communicate to the audience. Costumes are intended to provide information about qualities and traits of the character wearing them and to express larger themes and moods about the production as a whole (Anderson & Anderson, 1984). The design process begins with a thorough analysis of the script (or score or libretto) and discussions with the director and the designers of other theatrical components (e.g., scenery, lighting, projections, hair, makeup) (Brewster & Shafer, 2011; Cunningham, 1989; Emery, 1981; Russell, 1985). Through this collaboration, an overarching creative idea, the production concept will emerge. All designs require research, but productions set in the past demand proficiency with the zeitgeist of the period, including the political, cultural, social, and aesthetic environment, in order to decide which elements to incorporate from that period into the costumes.

A common question posed within the context of historical productions is how accurately to reproduce clothing from the period. Since James Robinson Planché designed what are considered the first historically accurate costumes in 1823, for Shakespeare’s *King John*, there has been debate about whether strict historical accuracy in costume design is a useful goal (Reinhardt, 1968). Prior to Planché, costumes primarily consisted of clothing contemporary to the period of the production’s presentation worn with conspicuous symbolic accessories, used to announce a general and established character type (Russell, 1985). Beginning with Planché, however, came the belief that historical accuracy aids in

---

4 In 1926, the English lexicographer Fowler wrote that “many words spelt -re are now pronounced as if the spelling were -er” (p. 485). British authors preferred the -re spelling, he continued, but “in American usage the spelling of these is now -er” (Fowler, 1926/2009, p. 485). Some in the United States choose to utilize theater when referring to the building where plays are performed, and theatre when referring to the artistic practice, but this distinction is not implemented consistently (“Theatre,” 2016). Therefore, this study will employ theater in all cases, unless spelled otherwise in a quotation.
establishing a complete world, allowing spectators to inhabit a past time and therefore understand the play more fully. To those who advocate for precision, inaccuracy and anachronisms are distracting. They distance the viewer from the play and impeding understanding. Others, like costume professors Prisk (1966) and Russell (1985), argue exactly the opposite – historical accuracy is itself distracting. They contend that the meticulous recreation of historical fashion conceals the messages being communicated and divert audience attention at the expense of the deeper meanings of the play. This view holds that audiences can more easily understand clothing choices that mask or eliminate historical design elements because they are too foreign for contemporary eyes (De Marly, 1982).

Though these schools of thought have conflicted for nearly two centuries, little research has been done to address the topic. In fact, there is little scholarly research pertaining to Western costume design at all. The existing literature is written almost entirely by practicing costume designers for the popular press. When these authors address the inclusion of history into costume design, they often disagree with one another. Some advocate that historical plays be dressed in costumes accurate to the date of the play, insomuch as it is possible (Anderson & Anderson, Clancy, 2014; Holt, 1988). Other authors advise simplifying historical designs because they believe this method will allow costumes to communicate more clearly (Dabney & Wise, 1930; Emery, 1981; Kidd, 1996). Some recommend dispensing with historical representation altogether. They prescribe updating the setting of historical productions to the current time, and avoiding the presentation of period (O’Donnol, 1982). Remarkably, while these sources expound upon the degree to which historically accurate costumes communicate to audiences, none of them have research to support their claims, and do not even define the term “historical accuracy,” leaving vague the
characteristics that must be present in order to achieve accuracy in costume design. By collecting qualitative data, this study aims to: (a) fill this void in the body of knowledge by addressing contemporary approaches to historical accuracy in theatrical costume design to develop an operational definition of historical accuracy, (b) increase understanding of the role of history in costume design, and (c) generate a grounded substantive theory and model of the creative process of incorporating history into theatrical costume design.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the role of historical accuracy in contemporary American theatrical costume design by exploring the experiences and perceptions of Broadway costume designers. Through interviews, this research investigated: (a) the characteristics Broadway costume designers believe are essential for historical accuracy in costume design, (b) the significance they place on historical accuracy for the success of the costume design, and (c) how they approach and incorporate history into their costume designs for historically set productions. Based on the analysis of interview responses, an operational definition for historical accuracy was developed, as were a model and a grounded substantive theory of the role of historical accuracy in the costume design of historically set productions.

Significance

This study is unique in its systematic examination of the costume design process from the perspectives of contemporary practitioners. It combined the creative practice of costume design with theories of fashion, integrating historical fashion and the communicative qualities of appearance. The definition of historical accuracy draws connections between an appearance model cited in apparel studies (Hillestad, 1980) and the field of costume design,
which is generally considered a separate and distinct discipline, and offers a framework for
designers and scholars within which to evaluate historical accuracy. The model diagramming
the costume design approach to a historically set production contributes to scholarly research
and provides guidance to practitioners as they embark on the creative design process. The
results of this research prepare a foundation to broaden the reach of costume design, and
theatrical design as a whole, as a field of interest for academic study. Utilizing the grounded
theory methodology to generate a substantive theory and model of the historical costume
design process adds to the body of knowledge by extending academic research to forms of
clothing not typically recognized as part of the apparel field. Through these avenues, this
research will be of interest to theorists, designers, and historians in both the costume and
apparel disciplines.

**Research Questions**

For this study, the following research questions were identified:

1. What is the definition of historical accuracy in terms of theatrical costume design?
2. How do designers perceive the importance of historical accuracy in costume design?
3. What is the process by which theatrical costume designers approach historically set
   productions?

**Objectives**

To investigate the previous research questions, the following objectives were defined:

1. Develop a definition of historical accuracy by exploring the essential components
   identified by current theatrical costume designers.
2. Explain how historicity relates to the process of theatrical costume design according
to contemporary practitioners.
3. Generate an illustrative model and grounded substantive theory of the design
   approach to historical costumes using concepts and themes acquired from the data
   provided by contemporary theatrical costume designers.
4. Create a basis for future scholarly research of the costume design field in general, and historically set productions in particular.

**Scope**

1. Participants were restricted to those who define themselves as primarily costume designers and who have designed a production on Broadway at least once.

2. The study primarily addressed costume design for the theater.

3. The literature reviewed for the costume design section of Chapter Two was written by costume designers. With very few exceptions (e.g., fashion historian Laver’s [1964] text about the history of stage costumes), literature written by directors, theorists, performers, set designers, or historians was not reviewed.

**The Role of the Researcher**

The foundation of qualitative research is “that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (Merriam, 2002, p. 3). Therefore, the individual conducting research is just as important as those who provide the data, because the positionality of the researcher affects “how one gathers and accesses data and how one constructs and views knowledge” (Tisdell, 2002, p. 69). This study’s researcher has an educational and professional background in Western theatrical costume design. She has been active in the field for more than two decades. Most of her theatrical career was spent in New York City, where she worked with all aspects of costumes, from design to manufacturing to wardrobe and maintenance. As a member of the Broadway community, the researcher was granted access that may have been limited to others. Her commonalities allowed camaraderie with participants, as well as insight into their responses, though her familiarity with the field also provided opportunities for assumptions and biases to impede analysis. Several strategies were utilized to countermand these potential obstructions to clarity of thought, including audit coding, frequent debriefings with an advisor, and reflective commentary in memos (see Chapter Three – Trustworthiness).
Limitations

1. The data collected in this study was derived from a sample of Broadway costume designers whose experiences are generally limited to forms of Western theater and therefore cannot be assumed to be representative of the entire population of costume designers.

2. The subjective nature of qualitative research extended to the collection of the data through the individual views of the participants and to its interpretation by the researcher who brings prior knowledge and personal biases to the study through her experiences as a theatrical costume designer.

Definitions of Terms

Terms used in this study are defined as follows:

**Accuracy**
“a: freedom from mistake or error: correctness; b: conformity to truth or to some standard” (Webster’s, 2002, pp. 13-14).

**Aesthetics**
“A branch of philosophy dealing with beauty and the beautiful esp. with judgments of taste concerning them” (Webster’s, 2002, p. 34).

**Appearance**
The “total concept” of “the human body as well as the coverings and embellishments placed upon it” (Hillestad, 1980, p. 117). The characteristics which constitute appearance stem from two different sources: those associated with dress [i.e., articles of clothing and adornment] and those associated with the body [i.e., forms, surfaces, and motions]” (Hillestad, 1980, p. 117).

**Authenticity**
“The quality of being authoritative, valid, true, real, or genuine” (Webster’s, 2002, p. 146).

**Broadway**
The center of American commercial theater, located in New York City. Of the forty Broadway theaters, only four are actually on Broadway, the street. Instead, they are near Broadway, between Sixth Avenue and Ninth Avenue, and between West 41st Street and West 52nd Street (Viagas, 1998).

**Code**
“A code is a system of meaning common to the members of a culture or subculture. It consists both of signs (i.e. physical signals that stand for something other than themselves) and of rules or conventions that determine how and in what contexts these signs are used” (Fiske, 1990, pp. 19-20).

Costume  “All the body garments worn by actors, all the accessories they carry as part of their characters, all the items related to hairdressing, and everything associated with face and body makeup, including masks if they substitute for facial makeup” (Russell, 1985, p. 5).

Costume design  The art of creating, developing, and selecting costumes that best define character and support the theme, concept, and mood of the production (Cunningham, 1989).

Costume designer  Member of the collaborative artistic team “responsible for the design, visual appearance, and function of the costumes, accessories, and makeup” (Gillette, 1992, p. 537). In this text, the term designer will refer to costume designers, unless otherwise indicated.

Fashion  A process by which a fashion “object that is noticeably different from its predecessors” is introduced, adopted first by fashion leaders and then “within and across social groups” until it achieves “social legitimacy,” followed by “social saturation” and eventual obsolescence (Sproles, 1985, p. 56). Fashion promotes “an ever-changing appearance, based on novelty and not necessity” (Scott, 2007, p. 79).

Grounded theory  “A qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process” by developing “interrelating categories of information based on data collected from individuals” (Creswell, 2007, p. 63).

Production  “A theatrical representation: the staging or performing of a theatrical entertainment” (Webster’s, 2002, p. 1810). A piece of entertainment may be staged multiple times, resulting in multiple productions. “Hamlet, for example, has been set in medieval Denmark, in Vietnam, and in contemporary dress” (Blausen, n.d.), each a discrete production of the same play. In theatrical parlance, a play is the textual script, a production is the unique realization of the play, and a show is a specific performance of the production.

Production concept  “Central creative idea that unifies the artistic vision of the producer, director, and designers” (Gillette, 1992, p. 2). The production concept informs the artistic team’s approach to every theatrical element.

Sign  “Signs are artefacts or acts that refer to something other than themselves; that is, they are signifying constructs” (Fiske, 1990, p. 1).
Street clothes “Clothes suitable for everyday wear in public” as opposed to a costume or uniform (“Street clothes,” n.d.). Street clothes are not synonymous with “street fashion” or “street style,” terms that refer to a style arising outside of the fashion system. In theater parlance, the term differentiates the performer’s personal apparel from the production’s costumes.

Substantive theory A non-generalizable “low-level theory” (Creswell, 2007, p. 65) developed to explain “a specific problem and/or population” (Powers & Knapp, 2006, p. 168).

Theater The collaborative and interpretive presentation of a story performed live for an audience (Brewster & Shafer, 2011). Conforming to American usage (Fowler, 1926/2009; “Theatre vs. Theater,” 2016), this study will employ theater in all cases, unless spelled otherwise in a quotation.

Theater-maker A person engaged in the art of producing and presenting a theatrical production.

Theory “A set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 15)

Western theater Theater that emerged “from the Greco-Roman traditions” and is produced in “the noncommunist countries of Europe and America” (Webster’s, 2002, p. 2597) (i.e., the European countries that were not within the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union, the United States, and Canada).
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Stage Costumes

Definition of Costume

The term “costume” is a word with many variations in meaning. The fashion and cultural studies scholar Kaiser (1997) attempted to encompass them all with her broad definition: “a style of clothes belonging to a particular cultural or historical context (often used to refer to ethnic or historical clothing, as well as clothing designed for performances or rituals – drama, Halloween, etc.)” (p. 4). As per the cultural or ethnic aspect of the definition, some scholars substitute “costume” for non-Western clothing, as in Priest’s (1945) *Costumes from the Forbidden City* and Bouttiaux, Sorber, and Cutsem’s (2008) *African Costumes and Textiles*. Others use “costume” when describing the dress of past periods, like Baumgarten and Watson (1999) in *Costume Close-Up: Clothing Construction and Pattern 1750-1790* or Payne, Winakor, and Farrell-Beck (1992) in *The History of Costume: From Ancient Mesopotamia Through the Twentieth Century*. There are also works, primarily from before the mid-twentieth century, that use costume simply to indicate clothing designs, or as Kaiser said, “a style of clothes,” as seen in Izor’s (1916) *Costume Design and Home Planning*, a book with the stated goal of helping to “establish in the minds of girls a sane, sensible, well-balanced attitude toward dress” (p. ix).

However, to some, the word “costume” is not interchangeable with “clothing,” “dress,” or “fashion.” Kaiser (1997) introduced this concept in the final portion of her definition, when she mentioned the performative costume. There are many kinds of performances, as Kaiser noted, but this study focused on costumes designed for the theater, the collaborative presentation of a story performed live for an audience (Brewster & Shafer,
2011). Costumes for the theater were defined by costume design professor Emery (1981) as the “garments, accessories, and related items [that] establish the illusion the costume designer envisioned for the characters and the production” (p. xvii). A costume designer, therefore, is the theater-maker “responsible for the design, visual appearance, and function of the costumes, accessories, and makeup” (Gillette, 1992, p. 537). The costume designer’s charge is not just to dress the performers, but to select costumes “that will best suit the actors in their roles and at the same time reinforce the flavor of the whole presentation” (Anderson & Anderson, 1984, p. 10).

This mission differentiates costume from fashion. Typically, costumes are made up of clothing, and while that makes them superficially similar to fashion and often inspired by it, the two exist in separate spheres. In her essay in Identities Through Fashion, Brach (2012) defined fashion as “the style that belongs to the present moment” (p. 50). Fashion historian Scott’s (2007) definition was consistent in that fashion is “based on novelty, and not necessity, [and is] considered desirable and sought by as many people as possible” (p. 79). These characteristics are not true of costumes, which are regarded as a “separate category” (Brach, 2012, p. 53), a different, though “very interesting field of design” (Traphagen, 1932, p. 99). In Costumes and Settings for Historical Plays, Cassin-Scott (1979c) was clear that “creating stage costume must never be compared with fashion designing. They are two distinct arts” (p. 9). Costumes, even those representing current styles, “are not taken as fashion, as acceptable to wear now” (Brach, 2012, p. 53).

Several costume scholars articulated the differences between fashion and costumes from their point of view. For instance, in Theatrical Design and Production (1992), Gillette

---

5 The terms design or designer in this study refers to costumes, unless otherwise indicated.
explained that unlike a costume, in fashion “primary attention is given to creating a striking visual design that gives little, if any, thought to the personality or character of the person who ultimately will wear the clothes” (p. 377). Costume designers Anderson and Anderson (1984) agreed that:

Fashion dictates with no regard for the individual and no concern for how the style will look on many who copy it. It declares what will be considered beautiful and therefore what will be thought ugly by reason of no longer being fashionable. (p. 25)

However those issues do not apply to the design of stage costumes. Instead, Saunders (1937) states in Costuming the Amateur Show that for costumes “the general effect is the main thing; they are used, not to emphasize you as an individual, but to create the illusion of an entirely distinct and different personality. Hence, their design is always subordinate to the plot” (p. 1). A costume not only clothes the body, but, as costume design professor Cunningham (1989) explained, “visually defines the character portrayed by the actor, and … helps establish the overall theme (idea) and mood (atmosphere) of the production” (p. 3). In most contemporary Western theater, a show has a production concept, or “central creative idea that unifies the artistic vision of the producer, director, and designers” (Gillette, 1992, p. 2). Anderson and Anderson (1984) emphasized the importance of the production concept because “costume design concerns itself with dramatic interpretation and character; it deals with the overall production concept first, the costumes as a whole, then the individual costume” (p. 46). While in fashion design, the authors postulated, a concept “may be established for a particular show,” it is ordinarily not part of a collaborative effort to communicate principal themes through the construction of a unified world (Anderson & Anderson, 1984, p. 46). Costume designers are “responsible for the visual appearance of the

---

6 All italicized words within quotations are original to the source.
actors” as fashion designers are for their models (Gillette, 1992, p. 15), but also must
“interpret visually and verbally the action, style, and characters of the play, the costumes and
manners of the historical period, and the elements of the style of presentation” (Cunningham,
1989, p. 12). In their 1925 book *Costuming a Play*, Grimball and Wells were clear that a
costume designer’s function “is to design costumes for a theatrical performance through
which a truth, a story or a characteristic is to be shown by the aid of [the designer’s] designs,
which must be more than just designs for dress” (p. 6). In contrast to fashion design, and
often while incorporating aspects of the fashions relevant to the production’s time, costume
designers must “attempt to generate a collaborative artistic expression that is thought-
provoking, emotionally evocative, and well beyond a perfunctory interpretation of the play”
(Brewster & Shafer, 2011, p. 152). For costume designer and historian Young (1927),
weaving “the delicate texture of mood from scene to scene … will be recognized as the
legitimate field of costuming” (p. 3).

**Taxonomies of Costumes**

This study investigated the process of costume design specifically as it applies to the
design of costumes for historically set productions. In the taxonomies developed by costume
scholars and practitioners, this type of costume is commonly perceived as a discrete category
of costume design. These taxonomies grouped costumes in accordance with shared
characteristics in the costumes themselves, necessary concerns due to the text and style of the
plays, and various other considerations.

For instance, Grimball and Wells (1925) labeled the “four general types of costume
which are used in theatrical designs” as “the historical, the fantastic (which includes the
symbolical costume), the dance costume, and the modern dress” (p. 6). Grimball and Wells
did not explain further, so the symbolical costume in this case could refer to those epitomizing abstract ideas like memory or beauty or an emotional state, as promoted by the Symbolist art movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Young (1927) separated costumes into *period clothes*, or costumes for historically set productions; *modern fashions*, or costumes for productions set at the current time; and *gala dress*, those exuberant and elaborate “clothes worn by the choruses of musical plays and revues” (p. 12).

In 1930, Dabney and Wise, both designers and teachers of theater costume, also described three varieties of costumes, agreeing that *historical* and *modern* costumes merited their own categories. Alongside with those two, Dabney and Wise (1930) included “poetic, fantastic, mechanistic and other non-realistic and experimental costumes” (p. 127), a category presumably similar to Grimball and Wells’ *fantastic/symbolical* classification. In addition to *historical* and *modern* costumes, Prisk (1966) identified *national* costumes, those worn by people from a particular geographic area or by certain ethnic groups, as a specific category. She further described a fourth category, “traditional costumes [which] are symbolic, stylized representations of specific characters, such as Pierrot, Pierrette, and Harlequin,” (p. 4). Here Prisk presumably intended symbolic to mean the garments that are quickly and easily recognized by knowledgeable audiences as depicting these stock characters of pantomime and Commedia dell’Arte. Prisk acknowledged that “there are many other kinds of costumes: circus, fantastic, dance, skating, animal, and so forth. Most of these, however, are based on or derived from the four basic types” (p. 4).

The fashion design book *Costume Design and Illustration* (1932) written by Ethel Traphagen, founder and director of the Traphagen School of Fashion, included a section on stage design even though the book was written to address day-to-day wardrobes by teaching
“every woman in the world [how to] dress correctly, smartly, and economically” (Preface to the Second Edition, para. 5). Because her background was not in theater, Traphagen’s taxonomy offers room for more interpretation than others, but there are similarities to those developed by theatrical costume designers. “The [costume] field is so varied,” she explained to her fashion readers, “that it naturally separates itself roughly into four distinct types” (Traphagen, 1932, p. 99). She titled her first category civil, meaning the contemporary clothing “worn by civilians in their varied walks of life” (Traphagen, 1932, p. 99). Her second class of costume is the character costume, by which she possibly meant unrealistic costumes designed to accentuate the personality traits of characters, or perhaps symbolic costumes for specific stock characters in the vein of Prisk (1966). Traphagen’s remaining two categories were ornate burlesque and extravaganza, evoking Young’s (1927) gala costumes, and “period and national costumes in which one’s knowledge of history and costume is very essential” (p. 99). Even without training in costume design, Traphagen recognized the special deliberation due to historical costumes.

In 2014, award-winning costume designer Deirdre Clancy identified her own taxonomy as “four strands of costume design” (p. 56). The first strand Clancy (2014) described was contemporary clothing, “where the actors are intended to look like ordinary people in the everyday world” (Clancy, 2014, p. 56). This strand mirrors what Prisk (1966), Dabney and Wise (1930), Grimball and Wells (1925), and Young (1927) called modern, and what Traphagen (1932) titled civil. Clancy also described a category she called post-modern, in which the “appearance of the costume is dictated by an intellectual concept” (p. 63). These costumes, comparable to Dabney and Wise’s non-realistic and experimental costumes, “emphasize intellectual constructs, parallel experiences and narrative forms” (p. 64). Clancy
called her third strand *showbiz glitz*, or “good old-fashioned show business glamour” (p. 64),
similar to Young’s gala and Traphagen’s extravaganza costumes. And as in each of the other
typologies, Clancy classified the *period* costume as a distinct strand of costume design. It is
clear, based on their presence in all six classifications systems, that costumes for historically
set productions have unique characteristics. In fact, they have such import that fashion
historian Laver (1964) asserted that “we refer” to plays featuring characters “dressed in the
clothes of people of other times and places” as “costume plays” (p. 1). Young acknowledged
the tendency “to think of period clothes as being the whole field of costume design” (p. 11),
and almost a century later, Clancy recognized that historical design is often “what most
people think of as ‘proper costume’” (p. 59).

**History of Theatrical Costume Design**

It was not ever thus that costumes designed for historically set productions received
special attention. Before the nineteenth century, the time period in which a production was
set was of little import to either practitioners or audiences. From Greek and Roman dramas,
to the morality and mystery plays of the Middle Ages, through the Renaissance spectacles,
stories were presented as universal, with characters who were instantly discernable types,
“ranging from gods and heroes to innocent virgins, wily slaves,” harlots, or villains, but not
individuals (Clancy, 2014, p. 13). In contemporary theater, Western audiences generally
expect a production to express a single encompassing artistic vision, a vision imparted by a
creative leader who unites all the disparate theatrical elements under one original concept.
Until the Victorian Era however, the components of a theatrical production remained
separate and unrelated. There was little concern for a unified vision, and there was no call for
an artist to produce a cohesive work of art.
This lack of cohesion can be viewed as surprising considering the purpose of theater had remained essentially unchanged since Aristotle instructed theater-makers to create “the most realistic representation” of a situation by achieving unity of action in order to arouse emotion, provoke delight, and spur learning (Aristotle, 2000, p. 47). Yet theater-makers did not think realism in costumes was necessary to the work of creating realistic worlds on stage, and there was certainly no costume designer developing costumes “to help delineate the character and further the interpretation of the play as a whole,” a commonly accepted definition of contemporary costume design (Anderson & Anderson, 1984, p. 10). It was not until the actors’ union staged a successful strike in 1919 that performers on Broadway were no longer required to provide their own costumes, and it was another 17 years until the stage design union “recognized costume design as a separate entity” (Blausen, n.d.). It took until the 1950s and 60s, with “the rise of the big name designers” like Irene Sharaff (1910-1993) and Patricia Zipprodt (1925-1999), for costume designers to be hired to design an entire show instead of individual scenes, finally establishing costume design as a fully integrated aspect of theatrical productions (Morris & Morris, 2011, p. 13).

When costumes were the responsibility of the performers, they were limited to what they or the theater owned, and for centuries, designs were developed using similar methods. Beginning with ancient Greek drama, costumes were a “mixture of everyday wear with elaborate overlaid accessories” meant to indicate gender, social position, age, and morality (Russell, 1985, p. 215). Such accessories might include exaggerated headdresses or masks “decorated with large symbols and ornaments to increase theatrical effect” (Russell, 1985, p. 196). Every kind of characterization could be achieved by wearing “a few symbolic or exotic accessories” on top of heightened contemporary clothes (Russell, 1985, p. 15). For instance,
during the Neoclassical seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, comedies “were usually played in costume that was an elaborated version of the fashions of the day” (Clancy, 2014, p. 22). As with comedies, tragedies were performed in a conventionalized style that began with ever more exaggerated contemporary styles and silhouettes, but “rigidly stylized” Roman details supplemented the designs (Clancy, 2014, p. 22). The heroes of tragedies, “standing as they did for the fate of western civilization,” wore costumes that could be identified onstage because of their Neoclassically interpreted Roman armor, skirts, and extravagant towering ostrich-plumed headdresses (De Marly, 1982, p. 12). Most tragedies were written with mythological, Greek, Roman, or biblical subject matter (Russell, 1985), but no matter the setting, heroes wore the contemporary/Roman mélange called the habit à la romaine for at least 200 years (Anderson & Anderson, 1984). Symbolic design details were immediately recognizable to the audience, who could appreciate when a performer represented an archetypal character “at one glance as soon as the actors walked onto the stage” (De Marly, 1982, p. 20). The convention of dressing comedies in heightened contemporary clothing and tragedies in “a fantastic version” of Roman clothes that, but for surface details also looked contemporary, continued until the end of the eighteenth century (Clancy, 2014, p. 24). Lead performers with connections might be fortunate enough to be recipients of the donation of discarded garments – or even more rarely, brand-new garments – from wealthy patrons, but “everybody else had to make do with what was in the [theater’s] wardrobe,” an approach that certainly did not provide a cohesive production concept (De Marly, 1982, p. 49).

**Historical Accuracy in Costume Design**

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the structure and formality of Neoclassicism gave way to idealistic and emotional Romanticism, and attitudes towards
historically set theatrical productions (and history in general) began to change. Neoclassicists believed “history unfolds as a continuous drama of progress toward a fixed and discernible goal,” but the Romantics disagreed, believing that “history and historical destiny are precisely tied to who we are and what we have been” (Russell, 1985, p. 284). Romanticism emphasized authenticity and experience, which cyclically derived from and led to interest in archaeology and history, introducing new prominence to research in the presentation of past periods and “a thirst for historical accuracy” (Laver, 1964, p. 100).

In 1823, British designer and historian James Robinson Planché designed what is considered the first attempt at historically accurate costumes for a production of King John, which Shakespeare set in the thirteenth century (Anderson & Anderson, 1984; De Marly, 1982; Finkel, 1988; Reinhardt, 1968; Russell, 1985). This notion was so novel, it was promoted in the advance advertisements for the play:

The Publick is respectfully informed that Shakespeare’s Tragedy of King John is in a forward state of revival at this Theatre, and will shortly be produced with an attention to Costume which has never been equaled on the English Stage. Every character will appear in the precise habit of the Period – the whole of the Dresses and Decorations being executed from copies of indisputable authorities, such as Monuments, Seals, illuminated Manuscripts, painted Glass, &c. (Reinhardt, 1968, p. 525).

Planché was devoted to historical accuracy and “sought absolutely authentic sources on which to base his designs,” believing that proper and precise costumes “would attract audiences and instruct them in history…[and] would add theatrical effect to a production” (Reinhardt, 1968, p. 528). He published books of his designs and the thirteenth-century sources that inspired his costumes to better educate the public, who enthusiastically embraced historical accuracy as both instruction and entertainment (Finkel, 1988). In addition to introducing the quest for authenticity, Planché’s other innovation in costume design was to provide equal attention for main and minor characters, so that there was a
unified presentation of costumes on the stage (De Marly, 1982; Laver, 1964). This too marked Planché as a pioneer because “coordinating the costumes of the complete production was an entirely new idea” (Anderson & Anderson, 1984, p. 17).

By the mid-nineteenth century, “historical accuracy had taken hold as the theatrical and moral principle of the theatre,” according to theater theorist Monks (2010, p. 53). British producer Charles Kean presented the works of Shakespeare as enormous historically accurate spectacles meant to overwhelm the audience with entertainment and instruction. In the 1853 preface to the published program notes featuring the source materials used for the designs of *Henry VIII*, Kean wrote that his purpose was “to render the stage what it should be – a true and perfect mirror of history” (Finkel, 1988, p. 4). Providing the “truth” of the period to the audience was held as a much more important objective than their amusement, and accurate costumes were “presented as a form of authenticity that produces moral insight” (Monks, 2010, p. 53). The press, the audience, even Queen Victoria loved these huge productions which announced their “unimpeachable accuracy in the costumes and decorations” in their playbills (Finkel, 1988, p. 8). “Stage designers, and even audiences, were becoming increasingly ‘period-conscious’,” and truth in presentation was greeted as the most proper method of theatrical design (Laver, 1964, p. 167). The implication was a correlation between costumes that were “magnificent and strictly correct,” as Queen Victoria wrote in her journal in 1852 (Finkel, 1988, p. 7), and moral superiority (Monks, 2010).

As Romanticism transitioned into Realism at the end of the nineteenth century, historical accuracy in service to truth remained the primary approach to productions set in past periods. Both Romanticism and Realism were idealistic movements that strove for

---

7 It is worth noting that Kean, as producer, is credited with the costumes for his productions, rather than a costume designer.
authenticity, but Romanticism was reliant on emotion and imagination, and Realism emphasized objectivity and observation. Due to the emphasis on accuracy as the path to insight, for Realism and its more extreme and pessimistic descendent Naturalism,\(^8\) “every attempt is made to reproduce correctly the details of dress and accessories” to best present the character as a genuine person (Cunningham, 1989, p. 32). The spectacle of Romanticism was renounced for the pursuit of “wider social truths,” which in fact both “rejected and reiterated” the emphasis on costume (Monks, 2010, p. 62; p. 61). Realism renounced Romanticism’s lavish costumes, as mere pageantry, but maintained the earlier movement’s emphasis on the importance of truth and accuracy. Realism’s fervor for strict reproduction was based on “the scientific, objective analysis of life” and was meant to present “an absolutely accurate environment in order to show its influence on character” (Russell, 1985, p. 303).

In *Naturalism in the Theatre*, playwright and author Émile Zola (1881/2000) demanded “truth in costuming” achieved by literally copying “from documents of the period” in service of “absolute authenticity” (p. 365; p. 362). For Zola, it was “natural for the public to demand an exact reconstruction of past times on stage. Hence this is not just a whim or a passing fad, but the result of a logical intellectual journey” (p. 363). Accuracy “immediately establishes a situation, tells us what world we are in, reveals the characters’ habits,” and brings excitement to the action portrayed on stage (Zola, 1881/2000, p. 360). Only authenticity could establish a complete world populated with real people, allowing spectators access to a past time and the ability to understand the play fully, the goal of the Aristotelian

---

\(^8\) These two movements insisted on the importance of ordinary people living everyday lives. However, Realists maintained that individuals could control their choices and therefore their futures, but Naturalists argued that the external forces of heredity and environment made decisions and the circumstances resulting from them inevitable.
model of theater. Any inaccuracy or anachronism would distract the audience, distanc-
ing them from the play and impeding the appreciation of the truths presented, a fate to be
avoided at all costs (Amer, 2009). After the proliferation and promotion of historically
accurate Romantic and Realistic theatrical productions, audiences wanted to see genuine
people in believable situations in whole environments and were no longer content with the
jumbled – and often unrelated – mix of contemporary and symbolic costumes of earlier eras

**Arguments Against Historical Accuracy**

The value of historical accuracy was never uncontested. Audiences reacted positively,
but many theater practitioners and scholars did not share the same perspective (Finkel, 1988;
Reinhardt, 1968; Russell, 1985). While advocates for authenticity believed theatergoers were
best instructed and entertained through careful reproductions of past styles, and that
inaccuracy would distract them from the production’s themes, opponents believed the precise
opposite – that it was accuracy that distracted audiences. Some believed that historically
accurate displays overwhelmed the text, burying the truths meant to be presented and barring
the audience from understanding the themes of the play (Finkel, 1988). This was a common
criticism of Charles Kean’s productions in the 1850s, that the devotion to historical
replication “came near to choking the plays with irrelevant authenticity,” as theatrical
designer and teacher Barton (1967) bluntly phrased it (p. 350). She, and other critics,
believed the “weight of ‘historical accuracy’ which accumulated during the nineteenth
century … slow[ed] down the action and invest[ed] the productions with a reverent stuffiness”
(Barton, 1967, p. 350).
Others argued that some historical eras had clothing so different from contemporary styles that audiences would find them comical or grotesque, and would then be diverted from the themes and truths onstage. This assertion concerning “the extreme oddity of dress in some periods” has been an issue throughout the entire chronicle of historical accuracy in theatrical costume design, and was a charge even Planché faced in the 1820s (Finkel, 1988, p. 4). In his text, Zola (1881/2000) announced himself confused: “the theory of those critics who are irritated by such meticulous reproduction is that it is destructive of audience attention when the play is performed. I confess I do not understand” (p. 360). “How can one not sense the excitement that accurate scenery brings to the action?” he asked (Zola, 1881/2000, p. 360). Interestingly, in the early twentieth century, theater theorist Bertolt Brecht developed a new type of theater that had as its mission to distract its audience (Brecht, 1940/1996). Brecht advised that alienating viewers would “encourage the audience to have a more critical attitude to what’s happening on stage” and “think about their own life” (Amer, 2009). According to Brecht, a theater piece, by definition, is unrealistic and therefore should never attempt to imitate reality. Undertaking any kind of accuracy is a worthless endeavor, as only the juxtaposition of random elements will jolt the audience from its comfort. While some elements of Brechtian theater (e.g., breaking the “fourth wall” to speak directly to the audience, nonlinearity of plot) are regularly seen in contemporary theater-making, a full piece in the Brechtian mode is meant to be uncomfortable to watch. The majority of American theater is staged in the Aristotelian vein, in which the immersion of the audience in the depicted world is the goal and anything that alienates viewers is to be eliminated (Basuki, 2002; Johnston, 2012).
While Brecht wanted the audience to notice and remark upon curious elements, most costume practitioners fear distracting viewers. In 1992, Gillette agreed with Zola’s detractors and their descendants, going so far as to say that “if contemporary fashion, which to a great extent determines audience reaction, dictates [that historical styles] were ugly, silly, or funny looking, any costume designer would be ill-advised to insist on absolute historical accuracy” (p. 73). Prisk (1966) believed that “costumes too burdened with detail may attract too much attention to themselves as individual costumes and take audience attention from the characters and the play” (p. 86). To prevent the possibility that viewers might be distracted “with unfamiliar and irrelevant details,” Barton (1935/1963) advised against the “mere slavish concern with accuracy” (p. vii). In fact, “slavish” was not an unusual charge leveled against historical accuracy advocates, as in Melvill’s (1964) disgust at stage designers who created a “slavish imitation of the original” (p. 206), Anderson and Anderson’s (1984) similar attitude towards “such slavish attention to historical detail” (p. 18), and Gillette’s (1992) argument against “slavishly copying historical designs” (p. 73). Barton countered that there is more required of successful costume design: “If authenticity was the sole aim in the designing, a fig for authenticity!” (p. ix).

Clancy (2014), a contemporary advocate for historical accuracy, acknowledged that her perspective is not always appreciated, because “many contemporary directors and designers feel that period costumes are by definition fussy, and therefore are both distracting and irrelevant” (p. 63). However, she still recommended authenticity because “other ages had different aesthetic values, unfamiliar ideals of beauty and (to us) peculiar ideas about what was sexy, and properly thought-through period costumes can express this like nothing else” (Clancy, 2014, p. 59).
Another argument against historical accuracy in costume design is the frequently cited reason that it is frankly impossible, a difficulty noted early and often (De Marly, 1982; Fernald & Shenton, 1937; Melvill, 1964; Roberts, 1973; Young, 1927). Russell (1985) goes so far as to say, “Many theatrical designers believed that absolute fidelity to the past was possible. In every case their failure was complete” (p. 171). Notwithstanding the extremity of this statement, many costume practitioners and historians agree that designers cannot help but incorporate elements of their own period into designs purporting to reproduce those from the past, making historical accuracy unattainable (Anderson & Anderson, 1984; Bicât 2006; De Marly, 1982; Gillette 1992; Ingham & Covey 1983; O’Donnol, 1982). Russell (1985) continued his full dismissal of the possibility of historical accuracy, “no matter how objective and self-critical [designers] may be about their work and no matter how much time they spend studying every possible visual source from the past” (p. 171). Young (1927) similarly held that viewpoint, saying that “the modern touch creeps in, even by the process of selecting from old books and manuscripts. Unconsciously, the modern taste will choose that which is pleasing to the modern eye” (p. 14).

Cunningham (1989), who also believed “the modern designer brings a current view of fashion and beauty as well as a personal taste and style to the evaluation and interpretation of period research,” offered specific ways in which contemporary style can subvert historical accuracy (p. 63). She submitted that even if intentions towards creating a historically accurate costume were genuine, “almost always it is worn over the currently fashionable undergarments. These undergarments produce the currently fashionable figure which may or may not relate to the silhouette of the earlier style” (p. 63). In his analysis of Planché’s 1823 costumes for *King John* (1968), costume designer and historian Reinhardt makes much the
same point. Though Planché professed absolute authenticity in his costumes, Reinhardt (1968) determined that almost all of his designs “subtly alter period silhouettes to conform to the shape of contemporary fashions,” presumably at least in part through the use of the undergarments in fashion at the time (p. 539). Finkel (1988) too observed that Charles Kean’s mid-nineteenth century historically accurate Shakespeare productions featured at least one actress “wearing a crinoline under her alleged eleventh-century costume” (p. 8).

Cunningham (1989) commented that, in addition to undergarments, “shoes, makeup, and hair styles are strongly influenced by current trends” (p. 63), and will often fail to incorporate the historical styles the production is attempting to depict. This is an assessment shared by Russell (1985) and De Marly (1982), who noted, “Hair is the last thing to be sacrificed” for the goal of accuracy (p. 62). Even Zola (1881/2000) recognized this phenomenon, deploring actresses’ tendencies to “invent a hairdo” when they think the historical style will “make them look ugly” (p. 362). Some of these costume professionals who believe in the futility of truly historical accurate costume design simply recommend that designers not even attempt it (Bicât, 2006; Russell, 1985; Young, 1927).

It is not only critics and scholars of later dates taking issue with the principles of Realism and Naturalism that Zola (1881/2000) espoused. In fact, by the turn of the twentieth century, theater practitioners began to contest the very notion of representational theater and its motives of staging “a picture of real life” (Russell, 1985, p. 359). As Laver (1964) declared, “there had been a revolt against realism” (p. 167). Presentational theater, of which Brecht was a proponent, was promoted in its place, an art form that preferred “an abstraction from reality” (Russell, 1985, p. 359). Where a representational performance “propose[d] to show events from life as they happen and allow the audience to ‘overhear’ the action”
(Cunningham, 1989, p. 30), presentational theater intended that the audience focus on what characters signify. A representational production tried “to have the audience forget it is in the theater” and instead believe it was watching an authentic situation unfold (Cunningham, 1989, p. 30), while a presentational production conveyed “abstract and poetic ideas” (Holt, 1988, p. 31). Those arguing against representational realistic theater endorsed costumes “that were evocative rather than descriptive, a simplicity that would suggest rather than reproduce” (Anderson & Anderson, 1984, p. 18). These theater theorists, in an ironic echo of the practitioners of early theater, rejected the portrayal of “reality and the objective facts of life and use[d] symbols to make their artistic points” (Russell, 1985, p. 312).

From this perspective arose an alternative approach to designing costumes for historically set productions, that of stylization or “the use of specific compositional elements characteristic of a particular style or period to create the essence of that style or period” (Gillette, 1992, p. 73). Stylized costumes can vary little from the original, closely duplicating “the line, mass, texture, and color of a particular style or period,” or can be nearly unrecognizable, a distorted reflection of “visual reality” (Gillette, 1992, p. 73). Stylized costumes “depart from real clothes in some obvious way” by finding “a visual expression of the spirit and meaning of a play” (Cunningham, 1989, p. 10; p. 33).

Costume scholars from various eras have recommended stylizing by simplifying the design of period clothing (Dabney & Wise, 1930; Fernald & Shenton, 1937; Gillette, 1992; Kidd, 1996; Zirner, 1957). Most believe that “historical dress must of necessity primarily evoke the period of the play being enacted,” but that only the era’s “general features” were necessary to illustrate it (Cassin-Scott, 1980, p. 11). In 1915, costume designer Mackay encouraged other designers “to avoid unnecessary fussiness of detail, mere overloading of
accuracy” (p. 4). Prisk (1966) stated “simplicity is generally the keynote of an effective costume, one that is free from distracting detail and projects by line and color” (p. 86), and costumer Cummings (1970) advised that “restraint and simplicity are usually more effective than excess and complexity” (p. 159). Suggesting characteristics of a period in lieu of attempting to reproduce them was supported by many practitioners (Anderson & Anderson, 1984; Bicât, 2006; Cassin-Scott, 1979a; Prisk, 1966). Often, costume scholars used two terms to convey their recommendations: that stage designers should create the “impression” of historical accuracy, or the “illusion.” For instance, costume designers Ingham and Covey (1983) advocated establishing merely the “impression of period” (p. 51). This terminology was also presented by Young (1927), who believed “if [a designer] can catch the impression of the times, he will do better than by the literal transposing of costumes from some old source book” (p. 14), and by Cummings (1970), who argued that “the impression of authenticity does not always depend upon exact reproduction” (p. 159).

Likewise, Emery (1981) believed creating “the illusion of the given period or style” was all that was necessary for theatrical costumes (p. 12), and Russell (1985) advocated for developing “the illusion of period reality” (p. 172). Melvill (1964) asserted that due to the impossibility of reproducing the clothing of past eras, “the most that any modern costume-designer of period costumes can offer is the illusion of accuracy” (p. 35). Indeed, costumers Fernald and Shenton (1937) proposed that truly “the illusion of accuracy” is “all that he is able to do” (p. 13). Similarly, Clancy (2014) advised that theatrical designers interested in this approach “take the shape of the appropriate period style and strip it of all decoration” to depict “the essence of the period in question through the use of pure shape, without the eye
being distracted by any unnecessary detail” (p. 60). Zirner (1957) referred to the process as the “abstraction of straight realism” (p. 8).

An alternative to simplification, the exaggeration of design details is another method of stylization (Dabney & Wise, 1930; Russell, 1985). In his series about costumes and sets for historical plays, Cassin-Scott was a clear proponent of this strategy, explaining in the third volume “that carefully planned exaggeration is an essential factor in theatrical costume” (1979b, p. 6). In the fourth volume (1979c), he continued: “larger than life attitude to theatrical costume is most important” (p. 7). Emery (1981) also used the term “larger than life” to describe the “scale of the theatrical costume and the detail in it” (p. 3). Grimball and Wells (1925) promoted both exaggeration and simplicity, saying stage designers should “over-accent the important points in costume design” on one hand, and that “all unnecessary detail should be eliminated” on the other (p. 6).

**Contemporary Approaches to Historical Costume Design**

In contemporary Western theater, the presentational and representational models are each common, though the latter is far more prevalent. However, even in a presentational production, theater-makers generally still aim for unity of vision, the creation of a complete world inhabited by authentic people that Aristotle proposed thousands of years ago. Costume scholars have presented three primary methods of designing costumes for historically set productions if Aristotelian theater is the objective: (a) accurate period clothing, (b) stylized clothing that indicates period without being accurate to it, and (c) contemporary clothing (De Marly, 1982).

Despite the large number of practitioners and theorists who have disparaged *historical accuracy* since it rose to prominence with the Romantics and Realists, it remains
the first of the dominant approaches to the costume design of historically set productions. Designers such as Holt (1988) advocated for authenticity especially in plays presented in the naturalistic style:

Where the more specific and reliable your historical detail is, the more convincing your effect will be. In this genre you are aiming to convince the audience of the credibility of the action and any historical inaccuracies will be quickly spotted. (p. 28)

Anderson and Anderson (1984) asserted that historical accuracy was not necessary for every production, but “in some plays the costumes may need to present realistic clothes of the period” and encouraged stage designers to “design a costume as if he or she were actually living in that period” (p. 91; p. 86). Regional theater designer Brady (1973) concurred that representational productions portray characters who “are concrete, real people, and their clothes must be as real as possible” (p. 33). The costume design group known as Motley (1964) was even more succinct: “Authenticity is essential” (p. 80). For historical productions, Clancy (2014) declared that “nothing but the costumes of the era will do,” for only they will “create a believable picture of reality that will be very moving” (p. 171). She further advocated for historical accuracy on behalf of the audience. With realistic period costume, “the social world of the story is brought to life in a way that helps the audience’s understanding of the behaviour and emotions of the characters” (Clancy, 2014, p. 59). Even Cassin-Scott (1979c), who argued so frequently for exaggeration in costume design, conceded that “most audiences delight in seeing actors and actresses dressed in realistic copies of historical costumes against the appropriate background. A certain authenticity has a great impact on the viewing audience” (p. 8).

The second approach to costume design for productions set in past eras is the stylization for which Cassin-Scott (1979a; 1979b; 1979c; 1980) primarily advocated: the
simplification or exaggeration, rather than the precise recreation, of period details. The proportion of realistic to stylized design elements can vary with the production concept. Gillette (1992) urged “designers [to] use the degree of stylization … to communicate the level of reality of the production to the audience” (p. 73). In lieu of reproducing historical research for stylized costumes, costume designers should utilize the process of selectivity to choose just the features that best communicate the production concept (Gillette, 1992).

According to Brewster and Shafer (2011), “artists first scrutinize and evaluate all potential choices, then select what they feel is the best option – the option that best expresses the intended thought, mood, or other design objective” (p. 154). Russell (1985) recommended a practice he titled “selective realism,” or “the inclusion of only those items of dress essential to illumination of character and reality, not the inclusion of busy details that suggest authentic period garments” (p. 306). For historical productions, he continued, “vagueness and suggestion must be the key” (p. 309).

Several scholars, including Russell (1985), noted that a theatrical designer “may think he or she has designed a ‘stylized’ production – that is, sets and costumes that stress line, texture, and color more than visual reality – only to find the audience accepting the entire scheme as authentic period reality” (p. 173). Gillette (1992) concurred that stylized costumes “normally will be interpreted by most audiences as being historically accurate and realistic” (p. 73). Costumer Kidd (1996) promised that “if the outline is correct, the overall impression of the costumes will be authentic” (p. 9), and Bicât agreed that if changes are made to period details, “the bulk of the audience will see the overall effect and will not be worried” (p. 26). Since many believe audiences do not notice the difference between minimally stylized and historically accurate costumes, and others simply prefer stylization in communicating
theoretical abstraction instead of reality (Chalmers, 1928; Cummings, 1970; Emery, 1981; Zirner, 1957), stylization is a popular contemporary strategy for the design of historically set productions.

The third approach to the design of costumes for productions set in past periods is seen the least but has its origins in the history of costume design. This method is based on the thought that plays originally performed in the contemporary clothes of the period in which they were written should always be performed in contemporary clothes (De Marly, 1982). Costuming historical productions in contemporary clothing reemerged as a legitimate choice in the 1920s and was especially applied to productions of Shakespeare. As De Marly (1982) explained:

The latest idea was to dress Shakespeare in the dress of today. It could be argued that this is what Shakespeare himself would have expected, for if his plays were done in mainly contemporary dress in 1600, the same could apply to 1925. (p. 138)

Designer Jory (2003) contended that “Shakespearean plays have always been conceived and produced in modern dress. This applies equally to the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries” (p. 83). She supported designing stage costumes using this technique so “that the performers should look like people recognizable to a contemporary audience rather than appear as romantic figures from Italian art history” (p. 18). Brewster and Shafer (2011) concurred that “the primary intent is to bring Shakespeare’s works into the modern age by making them more accessible to a contemporary audience” (p. 41).

This viewpoint applied to more than the plays of Shakespeare. O’Donnol (1982) noted that “modern dress’ is frequently utilized for a period play to illustrate the timelessness and universality of the theme” (p. xi). She submitted that “many plays written
and set at any time in the twentieth century may be brought up to date and staged in the current mode” (p. xiii), though in the foreword of the same text, Barton (1982) differed, stating “plays written in or about [the twentieth century] are indeed ‘costume plays.’ They will lose some of their significance if they are dressed in the fashions of ‘now’” (p. ix). She conceded, however, that “many recent successes in reviving the classics may be proving that to present a timeless *Hamlet* in clothes like those the audience is wearing is more valid than to put our fashionable garb” on plays of the earlier twentieth century. Clancy (2014), albeit a proponent of historical accuracy in costume design, admitted “many plays will look very good in modern clothes. Many of Shakespeare’s plays, for instance, update well, as do most texts that are written in one period but set in another” (p. 116). She acknowledged that “nowadays the fashion is to do eighteenth-century plays and operas in modern – or at least twentieth-century – dress, lest complex costumes ‘get in the way’” (Clancy, 2014, p. 191).

Some warn of dangers in this approach to historical productions. Smith (1973) addressed one such issue: “Costuming a classic play in modern dress can create anachronisms so powerful that they raise questions about the appropriateness of updating” (p. 116). Clancy too disapproved of this idea, submitting that audiences do not “enjoy productions in contemporary dress nearly as much” as those in realistic period costumes (Clancy, 2014, p. 6). She believed that “modern dress productions are sometimes thought of as less theatrical and potentially uncomfortable for all but the most sophisticated of urban audiences” (p. 6).

The purpose of this study is to understand the role of historical accuracy in contemporary American theatrical costume design. Research avenues investigated the development of the discipline and the roots of historical accuracy on the stage. While many
scholars argue against it, historical accuracy remains one of the three primary approaches to the costume design of historically set productions in American theater.

**Theoretical Perspectives of the Communicative Properties of Appearance**

The field of theatrical costume design is based not only on the necessity of literally clothing the bodies of performers, but also on the belief that clothing can communicate. *Communication* in this sense is defined, per Kaiser (1997), as “the meaningful exchange of information through visual personal cues” (p. 211) and is achieved through a multi-stage process modeled by Roman Jakobson (1960). In Jakobson’s model (see Figure 1), the *addressee* sends a *message* within a certain *context* using a method of *contact*, or “a physical channel and psychosocial connection” (p. 353). The *addressee* then interprets the message using a *code* “common to both parties” (Jakobson, 1960, p. 353). In the case of costume design, the context is the theatrical experience, the addressee is the designer, and the addressee is the audience. Thus the maker of the message (designer of costume) is not the presenter of it (wearer of costume), a scenario that can be found in other forms of communication. Another example is a written character speaking dialog created by a novelist, a concept Scholes (1982) called “duplicity of sender” (p. 31). In fact, theatrical performances include “duplicity of receiver” as well, in that the messages that characters direct at each other on stage are actually intended for the audience (Scholes, 1982, p. 31).

![Figure 1. Jakobson's (1960) model of communication. The line represents the contact, or the communication channel.](image-url)
Jakobson’s (1960) model specifies that the addressee receives the message through contact, a means of receiving the message. In the case of costume design, then, the information about play and character that the designer has chosen to feature is transmitted through the performer’s appearance. Once received, the message is interpreted using codes shared by designer, performers, and audience, a culturally defined “meaning system by which the message is structured” (Fiske, 1990, p. 35). Indeed, it has been noted that “theatrical costumes are probably the most obvious use of clothing to communicate” (Brach, 2012, p. 53) and that the “telling quality of clothes is the underlying principle of costuming” (Young, 1927, p. 2).

The message addressed to the audience can contain multitudes of meanings in varying levels of perceptibility. In contemporary Western theater, costumes are chosen to visually establish factual as well as emotional aspects of each character and to further the overarching themes and moods of the play (Brewster & Shafer, 2011; Clancy, 2014; Cunningham, 1989; Emery, 1981; Motley, 1964; Prisk, 1966; Russell, 1985). On the surface, costumes “set the character in time (historical period) and space (geographical or imaginary place)” (Cunningham, 1989, p. 3). Young (1927) wrote that “costume can be an index to the environment of the characters, an instant indication of the historical period … and even of the time of day” (pp. 4-5). Russell (1985) promoted the use of costumes to “locate and place the play” in the quite specific terms of “the city, the country, a particular nation, or in the north, south, east or west of a particular continent or country” (p. 4; pp. 5-6).

While communicating the physical location of the characters in time and place, costumes are additionally utilized at a deeper level, to display personal traits and attributes.

---

9 These appearance codes will be explored in more depth in later sections.
Costumes can signify the occupation of the character, either expressly, as with a police officer’s uniform; or more broadly, as with a business suit that suggests a type of profession rather than a particular one (Brewster & Shafer, 2011; Cassin-Scott, 1979a; Clancy, 2014; Motley, 1964; Russell, 1985). Prisk (1966) noted that fundamental function of costume design is that “before a character speaks a single line, the costume can help to establish for the audience his age, nationality, social status, likes and dislikes, and personality” (p. 3). The financial status of a character is often a primary message intended to be communicated through costumes (Clancy, 2014; Cunningham, 1989; De Marly, 1982; Emery, 1981; Jory, 2003; Motley, 1964; Russell, 1985). Young, writing in 1927, urged designers to remember that a woman’s clothing “has always been a good index to the economic standing of her lord and master,” by which she presumably meant a woman’s father or husband (p. 17).

Designers hope to communicate personality traits through costumes as well as attitudes towards those traits. For instance, a costume might indicate not only the amount of money available to a character, but also the character’s relationship to that money. As Brewster & Shafer (2011) explained, the costume could portray “more detailed character attributes, such as miserliness [or] generosity” (p. 162). As with attitudes towards money, costumes are typically planned to reveal a character’s position on a continuum of diverse viewpoints and sentiments, for instance, adherence to the sexual ideals or the moral conventions of the society depicted in the play (De Marly, 1982; Russell, 1985).

Thus costumes in the theater represent more than the clothes of which they consist. According to Monks (2010), “they become symbolic of a series of moral, emotional, and ideological qualities, and stand in for a set of broader social values” (p. 39). Costume designers depend on the communicative properties of appearance and the audience’s ability
to understand the intended messages, but designers generally do not examine the underlying assumption that these processes exist. However, within the apparel field several theoretical perspectives are utilized to support the conclusion that a garment can be the medium by which a message is sent from one person to others. *Semiotics, symbolic interactionism,* and Goffman’s (1959) theory of *dramaturgy* all serve as foundations for the conclusion that appearance “supplies numerous cues that can be used by others as a basis for forming inferences and making judgments” (Lennon et al., 2014, p. 171). In addition, though not a theoretical perspective per se, there have been positivist *impression formation* studies that have linked “the effect of clothing and appearance cues [to] people’s perceptions by manipulating them in experiments” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 37). As Johnson (2015) said, “fashion at its core is inherently about communication” (p. 1), and the following are approaches that researchers in the apparel discipline use to explicate the process.

**Semiotics**

Semiotics, “the study of signs, or more generally, the study of patterned communication systems” (Powers & Knapp, 2006, p. 162), is often cited when ascribing meaning to clothing and other appearance indicators. The theory is based on the work of Saussure\(^\text{10}\) who developed “the simple and elegant model of the linguistic sign, as the arbitrary conjunction of a *signifier,* or sound-image, and a *signified,* or concept or idea” (Penn, 2000, p. 228). In this binary linguistic model, the signifier is the physical form of the sign, “something which can be seen, heard, touched, smelled or tasted” (Chandler, 2007, p. 15). When combined with the signifier, the signified, the arbitrary and “abstract mental

---

\(^{10}\) The name of Ferdinand de Saussure is found in the literature in two forms. “De Saussure” (McCracken, 1988a; Powers & Knapp, 2006) appears to be less common than “Saussure” (Aston & Sanova, 1991; Barnard, 2002; Chandler, 2007; Danesi, 2007; Eco, 1979; Kaiser, 1997; Penn, 2000), which will therefore be employed in this study.
representation," a sign is constituted (Chandler, 2007, p. 33). Working at much the same time as Saussure, Peirce developed a triadic linguistics model that included not only word and meaning, but reader as well. The three components of the Peircian model are the representamen, the physical form of the sign akin to Saussure’s signifier; the interpretant, similar to Saussure’s signified, the mental interpretation of the sign; and the object, “something beyond the sign to which it refers (a referent)” (Chandler, 2007, p. 29). Despite their differences, both Saussure and Peirce emphasized the connection between sign elements as the strategy by which humans interpret signs as meaningful.

Notwithstanding its origination as a tool for the study of language, semiotics has been expanded for use in many other fields. Barnard (2002) used examples from disciplines other than linguistics to describe how the factual meaning of the sign, or its denotation,

will tend not to vary from person to person; the literal meaning of tweed or the literal content of an image is not likely to differ significantly between people. At least it must be said that the denotational meaning of words and images is not likely to differ significantly between people who are members of the same culture or who use the same language. (p. 85)

Contrary to denotations, the sign’s connotations, or “associations that a word or image has for someone,” are less easily understood, because the “the word or image will have more or less different associations for different people” (Barnard, 2002, 85). Connotations are based on familiarity with certain knowledge, generally but not always communal to a society (or a segment of society). They are interpreted through the employment of a code, “a set of shared rules that connects signifiers with signifieds” (Barnard, 2002, p. 82). For successful usage, “codes rely on commonality, that is an agreement amongst their users on their basics – the units they contain, the rules by which
these units may be selected and combined, the meanings open to the receiver” (Fiske, 1990, p. 77). Semioticians have examined these joint codes as they apply to:

the study of body language, art forms, discourses of all kinds, visual communication, media, advertising, narratives, language, objects, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, clothing, space, cuisine, ritual – in sum, to everything that human beings produce and use to communicate and represent things in some psychologically and socially meaningful way. (Danesi, 2007, p. 5)

As a non-verbal sign system, clothes “are of obvious relevance to semiotic inquiry, in that they reveal how connotation operates in one specific domain of material culture” (Danesi, 2007, p. 142). Their meanings can be interpreted due to their interconnection “with the other social codes of a society through which social variables such as attitudes, gender, age, class status, and political beliefs can be encoded” (Danesi, 2007, p. 142), a viewpoint embraced by costume designers. In his essay on costumes, the theorist Barthes (1955/1972) explicitly linked semiotics and costume design, writing that “the intellectual or cognitive cell of the costume, its basic element, is the sign” (p. 46).

The codes invoked by Barnard (2002), Danesi (2007), and Fiske (1990) – and Jakobson (1960) in his model of communication – are culturally defined principles that allow signs to be interpreted for communicated information. McCracken (1988a) agreed that “meaning-laden objects” like clothing can “only be read by those who possessed a knowledge of the object-code” (p. 20). Codes can be extensively or exclusively known. Fiske (1990) differentiated between broadcast and narrowcast codes. Broadcast codes are “simple,” with “immediate appeal,” and are shared by “members of a mass audience” (Fiske, 1990, p.

---

11 Even in instances when clothing has been printed with the written word and therefore showcases part of a verbal sign system, there are additional connotative messages communicated by the clothes, providing “a level of nonverbal communication that exceeds the literal meaning” of the featured words (Barnard, 2002, p. 29).
Narrowcast codes are recognized only by a “defined, limited audience” who often have specialized “educational or intellectual experience” (Fiske, 1990, p. 76).

Though codes are integral in communication, lack of code knowledge does not prevent observers from attempting to understand signs. Eco (1979) explained the process of *extracoding*, when interpreters adapt codes they possess to apply to unknown circumstances. Even without adequate information, the interpreter will endeavor to understand the sign and to establish meaning, yet in such situations the interpreter’s conclusion may vary widely from the communicator’s intention (Eco, 1979). Given the diversity of codes and cultures, however, Barnard noted how “remarkable” it is “that people from roughly the same age, class and cultural group will come up with almost identical connotations for a given word or image” (p. 85).

In costume design, because of the larger theater framework, extracoding is perhaps less of an issue than it might be with street clothes,¹² which may have fewer, and less carefully chosen, contextual clues for observers to decipher. Costumes are interpreted for messages through two sets of codes, those conventionalized by the larger society to apply to non-costume clothing, as well as those developed for the stage. Theater codes include conventions such as the lowering of a curtain to indicate an end to action and “a black hat, cloak and pronounced facial hair [that] communicate villainy on the stage” (Monks, 2010, p. 21). At a play, “the audience’s previous experiences of theatre will enable them to recognize and interpret clothing that they may have never seen beyond stage or screen performance”

¹² *Street clothing* is a theatrical term used to differentiate a performer’s personal clothes from the costumes. It is not to be confused with the terms “street fashion” or “street style,” which are used to refer to “fashions that originate with or are inspired by clothing worn by individuals, usually young, rather than with the fashion industry” (Calasibetta & Tortora, 2003, p.436). Street clothing does not imply any specific aesthetic, only that the clothes are meant for the street, or public sphere, as opposed to the stage.
(Monks, 2010, p. 21). These are the same type of symbolic design details that allowed past audiences to interpret the seventeenth and eighteenth century habit à la romaine costumes mentioned by Anderson and Anderson (1984), Clancy (2014), and De Marly (1982) as clothing to represent a hero.

Theater theorists and practitioners propose that because theater is a sign-system that utilizes both theatrical and cultural codes, “objects placed on stage acquire greater significance than in the everyday world” (Aston & Savona, 1991, p. 8). In theater, “everyone and everything placed within the theatrical frame has an artificial or pre-determined meaning” and “the process of signification is directed and controlled” (Aston & Savona, 1991, p. 99). This permits the audience to interpret the elements they see on stage, including the performers’ costumes, with some measure of confidence, because they know messages have been “truly meant” (Aston & Savona, 1991, p. 99).

One of the major criticisms of semiotics is that there is “no guarantee that different analysts will produce similar accounts” (Penn, 2000, p. 239). Aston and Savona (1991) cautioned that, “although theatre offers a system of signs which have been artificially placed and purposively thought out to create meaning, levels of interpretation must vary between individual spectators” (p. 120). In spite of this, Bicât (2006) expressed her conviction that the audience is “wonderfully adept at de-coding the messages you put into the costumes” (p. 36). Part of this process is due to the context of the production as a whole, with dialog and visual image “stand[ing] in a complementary relationship; the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level, that of the story” (Barthes, 1964/1999, p. 38). A syntagm is a semiological term meaning a “combination or sequence into which elements are combined” (Barnard, 2002, p.
Barthes (1964/1999) observed that the diverse verbal and nonverbal elements of a production unite to form the complete theatrical experience and to communicate the production’s messages to an audience that expects meaning in every element.

Coinciding with Barthes, Monks (2010) argued that costumes are aided in their communication through “their relationship with other systems of meaning of the stage,” like the “actor’s gesture and movement, and by the scenographic design for the production” (p. 5; p. 6). After all, costumes are never the only sign presented for interpretation. At the very least, there are performers wearing them. As Kaiser (1997) contended, “even when we lack a cultural framework for interpretation, then, we are influenced by the other cues” (p. 219), increasing the likelihood of similar interpretations and shared meanings. In his essay about theatrical costumes, Barthes (1955/1972) further defined the “ensemble of theatrical techniques: the actor’s performance, movement, and location, the setting, lighting, and specifically, costume” and asserted that together they manifest “the external, material expression” of the production’s themes (p. 41). In each production, the ideal is that the sign-systems “not only work in isolation, but also create the desired effect when combined with signs from other systems” (Aston & Savona, 1991, p. 100). Thus one of the basic principles of semiotics, that signs can only be interpreted in the presence of other signs, is likewise a premise of contemporary Western theater in general and costumes in particular, that elements must work together to create meaning.

**Symbolic Interactionism**

Another theoretical perspective that supports the contention that appearance can serve as a medium of communication is symbolic interactionism, based on the work of social psychologist Mead (1934), and his student, sociologist Blumer (1969b), who named the
theory. Symbolic interactionism maintains that people interact with each other using symbols, the meanings of which are continuously established and refined through the experiences of current and remembrances of previous interactions (Lennon et al., 2014). Interaction is defined by Davis (1985) as “the exchanges occurring among group members” (p. 114). The symbols in use during those interactions can be part of the “denotative sphere of spoken and written language” or communicated through “emotion, facial expression, body stance and gesture, speech inflection, the juxtaposition and arrangement of objects and materials in space, and via such modalities as poetry, music, dance, the plastic arts, clothing and ornamentation” (Davis, 1985, pp. 116-117). In symbolic interactionism, “the meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing” (Blumer, 1969b, p. 4) and are then understood because they “have shared meanings for people” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 42).

The premise of symbolic interactionism is that the responses of others, what Stone (1962) called reviews, are influenced by social norms developed and held by the culture in which the individual presents. In turn, individuals both anticipate and react to those responses, and correspondingly edit their own responses, called programs (Stone, 1962). Thus meaning is negotiated, socially constructed, and mutually defined and understanding established. While “an object may have a different meaning for different individuals, … out of a process of mutual indications common objects emerge – objects that have the same meaning for a given set of people and are seen in the same manner by them” (Blumer, 1969b, p. 11).

Appearance is a fertile field for symbolic interactionists. Human interaction, according to this perspective, shapes all aspects of life, and as Stone (1962) noted, “every social transaction must be broken down into at least two analytic components or processes –
appearance and discourse” (p. 87). Actually, Stone (1962) implied that appearance is more important than “verbal symbolism” in creating meaning because appearance “sets the stage for, permits, sustains, and delimits the possibilities of discourse” (p. 90). Indeed, “discourse is impossible without appearance” (Stone, 1962, p. 91). Kaiser (1983-1984) advanced the application of symbolic interactionism to appearance, stating that “clothes provide cues toward which individuals can make indications, allowing them to negotiate their identities or … to understand one another’s identities” (p. 2).

Symbolic interactionism is an appropriate framework for the study of costumes as well as the more comprehensive category of appearance because costume design, and theater as a whole, relies on the audience’s response to the performers on stage based on what they and their appearance signify (Fisher, 1978). Costumes, as previously noted, are part of the larger theatrical process and therefore are interpreted through the conventions that have evolved in that context.

In this way, costumes perhaps are more easily understood than street clothes, as they are part of a “repetitive and stable” joint action, “an interlinkage of the separate acts of the participants” in which all “have in advance a firm understanding” of the context (Blumer, 1969b, p. 17). In theater, participants “share common and pre-established meanings of what is expected” and through this “connection and continuity” (Blumer, 1969b, p. 17; p. 20), audience members can decode the messages delivered by costumes. Stone (1962) specifically commented on this topic, noting that:

Costume, therefore, is a kind of magical instrument. It includes all apparent misrepresentations of the wearer. As such its significance or meaning (the collective response that is mobilized – the coincidence of the wearer’s program with the review of the other) is built upon the mutual trust of the one who appears and his audience. (p. 109)
Costume designer Cunningham (1989) agreed that “a costume is a ‘magic’ garment – a garment that enables an actor to become, for a time, someone else,” a garment that can touch “the store of cultural information in the collective memory of audience” (p. 1). Costume design parallels the symbolic interactionist assertion that “dressed bodies [are] social objects invested with meanings” (Tawfiq & Ogle, 2013, p. 279).

Symbolic interactionism generally focuses on dialogical communication, or that between two individuals, both acting as communicator and recipient. Theater and other forms of media, however, are monological, or between one communicator and one recipient, each distinct from the other (Fisher, 1978). Nonetheless, interaction between audience and performers still occurs. Sociologists Horton and Wohl (1956) coined the term “para-social interaction” to define the illusional face-to-face interaction between spectator and performer. Calling it a “simulacrum of conversational give and take,” Horton and Wohl (1956) outlined a process that presents images and “makes available nuances of appearance and gesture to which ordinary social perception is attentive and to which interaction is cued” (p. 215). The audience, in witnessing relationships on stage and engaging in Jakobson’s (1960) duplicity of receiver, is “transformed into a group which observes and participates in the show by turns” (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215).

In fact, while this type of interaction is monological or, as Horton and Wohl (1956) described, “one-sided, nondialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible of mutual development” (p. 215), the structure of theater provides the symbolic interactionist model of communication with its terminology. Symbolic interactionists from Mead (1934) onward refer to the shaping of an individual’s self as role-taking. As Fisher (1978) explained, “the communicator in the interactional model is thus performing or acting a role,” and views
him- or herself “from this outlook of ‘other’,” adapting behaviors to suit beliefs about what those “others” expect (p. 178). Certainly this is a fair explanation of the theatrical process in which theater practitioners (including the actors) view actors, who are literally performing a role, from the perspective of the audience, the “other,” and plan the production’s visual, aural, and physical aspects accordingly. In this way, costume designers act as Fisher (1978) indicated researchers do, as external participant-observers, participating by actively choosing communicative symbols by taking on both the role of characters to imagine their interactions within the play and the role of the audience to anticipate viewer responses and then analytically observing the interpretive process.

Dramaturgy

The sociologist Goffman (1959) also adopted theatrical terminology to frame his perspective. In The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Goffman (1959), a student of Blumer, delineated his view of social interaction through an analogy with theatrical performance, identifying “the principles derived [as] dramaturgical ones” (p. xi). This descriptive phrase has led to the identification of Goffman’s perspective as dramaturgy. In theater, dramaturgy is a term that refers both to the composition of a piece of drama and the techniques used to create meaning for “a living audience at this time in this place” (Chemers, 2010, p. 3). A dramaturg\(^\text{13}\) is a member of a production’s artistic team who develops a knowledge of the historical, cultural, and social circumstances of the play and playwright. Though all theater-makers compile copious information pertaining to their particular fields, a

\(^{13}\) As with theater and theatre, the title of the person who performs the duties of theatrical dramaturgy has two spellings that hinge on the placement of an “e”: dramaturg and dramaturge. Most sources make no distinction in meaning between the two spellings, but some argue that the former is American and the latter, British (Mead, 2010). Therefore, I have chosen to utilize dramaturg, as Chemers (2010) and Danckert (n.d.) have.
dramaturg provides a deeper analysis of the production’s “genre, style, and performance” (Danckert, n.d.). Goffman (1959) applied this concept more broadly, submitting that, metaphorically, the process of analysis, knowledge application, and collaboration is present in every social interaction, is how individuals regulate impression management, and is what creates shared meaning.

The dramaturgical perspective posits that, comparable to an actor standing in front of an audience, “when an individual enters the presence of others, they [the ‘others’] commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed” (Goffman, 1959, p. 1). And also like an actor, the individual strives:

- to control the conduct of the others, especially their responsive treatment of him. This control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a ways as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan. (Goffman, 1959, pp. 3-4).

In other words, through the careful presentation of themselves, people attempt to manage the perceptions others develop of them. Per the dramaturgical perspective, life is a series of performances enacted to evoke a desired impression in others, a process Goffman (1959) called impression management.

However, as Goffman noted in both The Presentation of Self (1959) and in his chapter “The Theatrical Frame” in his 1974 book Frame Analysis, the life-as-performance analogy has “obvious inadequacies” (1959, p. xi) because “all the world is not a stage” (1974, p. 1). People observe theatrical productions differently they do daily interactions; the true theatrical frame is created through expectations derived from past experiences with the theater. In the theatrical setting, an individual is “an object that can be looked at in the round and at length without offense and can be looked to for engaging behavior, by persons in an
‘audience’ role” who will not participate directly in the interactions they observe (Goffman, 1974, p. 124). There is separation between audience and performers, yet in life, all parties are “inhabitants of the same realm,” thus “part of the same plane of being” (Goffman, 1974, p. 127). Ironically, though the audience is excluded from taking part in the interactions they regard, those interactions are presented entirely for their benefit, as demonstrated when performers in conversation “do not face each other directly … but rather stand at an open angle to the front so that the audience can literally see into the encounter” (Goffman, 1974, p. 140). A more important distinction lies in the very definition of theater, because while “the stage presents things that are make-believe; presumably life presents things that are real” (Goffman, 1959, p. xi). Goffman (1959) continued, unlike in theater, “the legitimate performances of everyday life are not ‘acted’ or ‘put on’ in the sense that the performer knows in advance just what he is going to do, and does this solely because of the effect it is likely to have” (p. 73).

The dramaturgical model provides only a metaphor for understanding social interaction, not a literal definition of it, but Goffman’s perspective is relevant to appearance both on and off stage. As Tseëlon (1992) wrote, for an individual to present the desired impression or “to claim a certain identity, it is not enough to be it” (p. 502). Instead, in life and in theater, a person must also seem to embody the claimed identity (Tseëlon, 1992). This demonstration of credibility may be achieved through the creation of an appropriate personal front, which Goffman (1959) defined as the aspects of appearance visible to spectators. Personal front is made up of “items of expressive equipment, the items that we most intimately identify with the performer himself and that we naturally expect will follow the performer wherever he goes,” (Goffman, 1959, p. 24). Examples of such items include
“insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like” (p. 24).

Through the dramaturgical perspective, it becomes apparent that an individual dressing for the day, akin to a costume designer choosing clothes for a character, must sort through all possible options to assemble the most suitable items of expressive equipment to communicate the information necessary to elicit the desired reaction from onlookers. Goffman (1959) referred to the clothing and other aspects of appearance as a costume, and despite not being chosen by a third-party costume designer, Goffman’s “costumes” and costumes for the stage are selected for the same reason. Both enable individuals to assume certain roles and to attempt to elicit specific impressions in observers. Goffman (1959) referred to items such as those that make up a costume as “sign-vehicles” (p. 1) and “sign-equipment” (p. 36) in that they convey information. He incorporated the language of semiotics and furthered the assertion that items of personal front serve to communicate traits of the metaphorical as well as the literal performer. Kaiser’s (1997) later words on Goffman’s theory apply equally to stage and street clothing: “Being cast in a role is facilitated by ‘looking the part’ and dressing in a costume that others have come to expect of a person in that role” (p. 193). Through their communicative capabilities, on stage as in life, “clothes are likely to contribute to credibility of performance and therefore to the meaning that arises from social interaction” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 193).

Impression Formation

That viewers interpret messages transmitted through the appearance of others is an accepted facet of the semiotic, symbolic interactionist, and dramaturgical perspectives, and the content of those messages and the means by which the messages are imparted has been
the subject of many studies. However, a considerable hindrance in discerning clothing’s meaning has long been, as Sapir described in 1931, “the lack of exact knowledge of the unconscious symbolisms attaching to forms, colors, textures, postures and other expressive elements in a given culture” (p. 141). In order to provide quantifiable answers to questions such as this, social scientists have conducted very specifically designed impression formation experiments (e.g., Damhorst & Reed, 1986; Gibson & Balkwell, 1990; Kaigler-Evans & Damhorst, 1978; Tseëlön, 1992; 2001; 2012).

Not technically a theoretical perspective, impression formation is a term that refers to the process of establishing perceptions of others during first encounters. According to Lennon (1999), “although impression formation is an individual process, there is fairly strong agreement among people regarding the kind of impression conveyed by a particular stimulus person,” an agreement that has been measured via experiments with carefully controlled variables (p. 105). Research investigating the communicative properties of appearance through semiotics, symbolic interactionism, and dramaturgy most often employs qualitative methods, but impression formation studies are quantitative in nature, “developing stimuli depicting individuals and measuring the impressions conveyed by the stimuli” (Lennon, 1999, p.103). Through the manipulation of appearance cues, impression formation studies have shown that “fashion items along with other aspects of appearance can be used as a basis for informing ideas about others in first impression situations” (Lennon et al., 2014, p. 171). These studies take as their “basic assumption that dress is a systematic means of transmission of information about the wearer” (Damhorst, 1990, p. 1).

Impression formation investigations have found that colors, textures, patterns, silhouettes, cosmetic use, and hair color, among other variables, influence perceptions of
“characteristics of the stimulus person, their social and cultural backgrounds, relationships with others, and types of situations and activities in which they were or might be involved” (Damhorst, 1990, p. 5). In Damhorst’s (1990) qualitative meta-analysis of impression formation studies from 1943 to 1986, and later in Lennon et al.’s (2014) similar analysis of studies from 1986 to 2013, four superordinate categories of content were identified to represent the information observers inferred about others on the basis of their appearance. Upon viewing images of the stimulus persons, participants in the 218 studies under review perceived attributes pertaining to the (a) evaluation of personality traits like character, sociability, and mood; (b) degrees of potency, signifying traits like power, competence, and intelligence; (c) dynamism, referring to activity, control, and stimulation; and (d) quality of thought, including flexibility and objectivity (Damhorst, 1990; Lennon et al., 2014).

Additionally, Lennon et al. (2014) found that inferences about psychological and biological characteristics including attractiveness, health, strength, and age, as well as demographic characteristics such as wealth, social status, and occupation, were derived from appearance. As Lennon (1999) had earlier concluded, impression formation studies show that people of the same culture tend to form similar impressions of stimulus persons based on their appearances, and therefore “it is possible for a costume designer to convey information about a particular character visually such that the information is widely understood by audiences” (p. 105).

The results of impression formation inquiries provide support for the contention that clothing communicates, and that appearance can express the messages that costume designers intend costumes to impart. In actuality, the foundations of impression formation studies and costume design are virtually identical in that “clothing and appearance are viewed as
providing clues about what a person is like” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 33). As in all methods of research, there are limitations to impression formation studies. One obstacle identified by several researchers is that “appearance perceptions are influenced not only by the images that are observed and evaluated, but also by the characteristics of the perceivers themselves” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 271). For instance, many studies have found “sex differences in assignment of meanings” (Damhorst & Reed, 1986, p. 96) and that “occupation becomes a critical parameter” as well (Kaiser, 1997, p. 284). Other influential perceiver variables are age, income, ethnicity, self-esteem, and interest in and awareness of fashion (Kaiser, 1997). The possibility that viewers of different backgrounds will interpret visual cues differently has not been lost on theater practitioners. Monks (2010) acknowledged that the audience’s “socio-economic context … will inform their relationship with the costume’s possible meanings” (p. 7), and Russell (1985) noted that the same could be true of the educational level of the audience. Gillette (1992), rather than specify any one element, submitted that “a wide variety of demographic information, such as cultural background and values … come into play” (p. 73). Costume and apparel scholars agree that the accuracy of communication can be compromised depending upon who is interpreting the messages.

Of course, neither costumes on the stage nor clothing on the street can be expected to communicate exactly the same information to every spectator. But neither is exact and precise coincidences of meaning required for communication to take place, only that a message has been addressed to a recipient (Jakobson, 1960). Though congruence of meaning, or shared understanding, is intended, it “is not an all-or-nothing concept in which the communicators’ orientations are either congruent or they are not. Congruence is a matter of degree and can range from nearly complete overlap to nearly no overlap at all” (Fisher, 1978,
Through semiotic, symbolic interactionism, dramaturgical, and impression formation studies, it has been quantitatively and qualitatively established that appearance conveys messages that are often interpreted in the same way by those of the same culture. Costumes are part of a design process that intentionally links the personality of characters to appearance cues, implying that they communicate with even more purpose than street clothes do. As Barthes (1955/1972) contended, “in all the great periods of theater, costume had a powerful semantic value; it was not there only to be seen, it was also there to be read, it communicated ideas, information, or sentiments” (p. 46). Writing from the standpoint of a fashion scholar, Brach (2012) concurred, saying costumes “provide the most explicit connection between fashion and identity, which would not work in the theatre unless it had some basis” in the non-performative experience of clothing (p. 53).

**Grounded Theory**

To explore the experiences of costume designers in terms of historically set productions, a grounded theory methodology was selected. Grounded theory was first established by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and expanded by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) as a tool for systematically collecting and analyzing qualitative data. A researcher utilizing grounded theory will evaluate data to develop “very useful description or conceptual ordering,” to discover “categories to build measurement scales,” or generate a theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 9; p. 288). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), a theory is “a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena” (p. 15).

The data from a grounded theory study may offer a substantive theory, a “low-level theory that is applicable to immediate situations” (p. 240). Because it results from the data of
one study, its real merit “lies in its ability to speak specifically for the populations from which it was derived and to apply back to them” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 267). Glaser and Strauss (1967) note, “a theory at such a conceptual level, however, may have important general implications and relevance” (p. 79) and is often generated using existing formal theory. A formal theory, less typical in grounded theory studies, is “derived from studying phenomena under a variety of conditions,” and is more generalizable, applying “to a wider range of disciplinary concerns and problems” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 23). Any product of a grounded theory study must be derived from, or grounded in, the data and is used to explain “a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants” or “how people are experiencing a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 63; p. 66).

Interviews are the predominant method of collecting data in grounded theory in order to “focus on understanding how individuals experience the process and identifying the steps in the process” (Creswell, 2007, p. 66). Once collected, data are analyzed through a process called coding in which common themes are recognized and sorted into categories. In grounded theory, analysis consists of three stages, completed neither sequentially nor concurrently but iteratively. The first and most extensive, called open coding, “involves taking data (e.g., interview transcriptions) and segmenting them into categories of information” (Creswell, 2007, pp. 239-40). Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommended that the analyst begin by “coding each incident in his data into as many categories of analysis as possible, as categories emerge or as data emerge that fit an existing category” (p. 105). The second stage is axial coding “whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making a connection between categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). The categories are compared to find “evidence of differences and variation” and “to verify what
we have deduced against data as we compare incident with incident” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 111). The last phase of analysis is selective coding, in which a core category, “or central phenomenon around which all other categories are integrated,” is developed “into a picture of reality that is conceptual, comprehensible, and above all, grounded” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116; p. 1). The process of selective coding also includes “filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116). The objective of selective coding is the development of a theory or visual representation of the categories and subcategories based on “concepts and hypotheses that have emerged from the data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 46).14

Grounded theories, built by investigating the experiences of those participating in an unexplored process, are intended to provide an explanation of that process. Indeed, the methodology has been utilized for this purpose in several apparel-related studies, such as Crane, Hamilton, and Wilson’s (2004) analysis of the incorporation of Scottish dress into feelings of Scottish ethnic identification; Tawfiq and Ogle’s (2013) examination of Saudi women and their private sphere dress; and Schofield-Tomschin and Littrell’s (2001) assessment of “older women’s involvement in textile handcraft guilds as a conduit or opportunity for successful aging” (p. 42). By using Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) and Strauss and Corbin’s (1990, 1998) methods, a grounded substantive theory of the role of historical accuracy in the contemporary American theatrical costume design process emerged.

---

14 The precise procedures and techniques of a grounded theory study will be explored in more detail in the Methodology section to follow.
Gaps in the Literature

Considering that the American population is surrounded by images of performers in television shows, films, advertisements, web programs, dance pieces, and theatrical productions (Short, 2013), and that every one of them is in some kind of costume, costume design is remarkably understudied by scholars of any discipline. Since costumes are thought to fall outside the realm of fashion, very few apparel scholars address costume design and those that do often seem to misunderstand it and its process. In their article about creativity, Rothenberg and Sobel (1990) proposed literally superimposing transparent photographs on top of each other and adopting the resulting mingled image as a “costume,” ignoring the concepts of script, character, and theme. Bugg (2009), who actually designed costumes for a dance piece and then interviewed the performers and audience members, almost never used the term “costume,” instead calling the clothes “concept-led fashion” (p. 27). In finding that “viewers’ reading of clothing-based work” can vary based on emotional responses, personal understanding of the body and clothing, and context, she suggested that “costume has the potential to become fully integrated in terms of sympathy to the movement and the physical restraints imposed upon the dancers, the choreography, and the context of the final communication” (Bugg, 2009, p. 27; p. 30). This conclusion somehow overlooked that there is in fact a field of costume design in which practitioners explore that potential every day.

Within the costume discipline, there is much literature, but little of it is of a scholarly nature. A search of 13 academic and industry English-language American or worldwide theater journals¹⁵ spanning nearly 70 years uncovered only 22 articles about costumes and an

additional 13 reviews of costume-related books. Seven of the journals have published neither articles nor reviews of books with costumes as their focus. The costume literature that does exist was written almost entirely for the popular press and seems to be divided into three general categories. There are large illustrated coffee table books featuring sketches and photographs of the costumes of particular designers [e.g., Owen’s (2005) presentation of Broadway designer Willa Kim’s costume illustrations], productions [e.g., Taymor’s (1998) chronicle about mounting *The Lion King*], or genres [e.g. Van Witsen’s (1994) illustrated survey of opera costumes]. Notwithstanding their beauty, what little text provided by books like these usually offers only the quotations of the featured designers without analysis.

Designers might mention the use of historical research, as with Patton Campbell who said, “I’m just fascinated by research, and often when I start a show I have to make myself stop going to the library, the museums, or wherever, because I love that” (Pecktal, 1993, p. 49), but, further exploration is limited. Specific perspectives and experiences with historically set productions are not examined, nor are ideas about what constitutes historical accuracy or thoughts pertaining to audience perceptions.

The second type of costume book is the design textbook and practical manual aimed at novice designers, amateurs, and students. These texts extend prescriptive instruction. The design process is presented in carefully ordered steps in sections such as script analysis, color

---

*Theatre Arts Journal, Theatre Communications, Theatre History Studies, Theatre Notebook, Theater Survey, Theatre Topics, and Theatre Forum.* The search was conducted in February, 2016.

choices, silhouettes, principles and elements of design, sketching, pattern making, and construction. These books consistently address the necessity of historical research in designing period productions. However, as recounted in the “Contemporary Approaches to Historical Costume Design” section, the authors regularly contradict one another as to the desirability of even attempting historical accuracy. Surprisingly, while these sources regularly discuss whether historically accurate costumes best communicate to audiences, none of them actually define the term “historical accuracy,” leaving vague the characteristics that must be present in order to achieve accuracy in theatrical costume design.

In fact, the only source for assessing accuracy in historical appearance was found in an article by Strauss (2001) about Civil War reenactors. He found that reenactors “glorified” uniforms “patterned after original museum artifacts” and made by hand, a method they perceived to be accurate but which actually is not – machine stitching was fairly common in Civil War uniforms (p. 153). This conception of “dress authenticity” seems very specific to the reenactment context and thus cannot be accepted as correct or complete for theatrical costume design. Yet, as Strauss noted, a definition is necessary “to adequately understand” any phenomenon (p. 148).

The third category of costume literature encompasses histories of stage design (De Marly, 1982; Laver, 1964). It is in this vein that the bulk of scholarly articles pertaining to costume design have been written. Presumably due to the origination of the discrete field of theatrical costume design in the nineteenth century, these articles tend to focus on designers of that era [e.g., Finkel’s (1988) article about Charles Kean]. There are also a few articles and books that address the costumes of Shakespeare’s plays, in terms of the original Elizabethan productions (Newton, 1975; Walsh, 2009), twentieth century revivals (Barton, 1967; Russell,
1958), or both (Lennox & Mirabella, 2015). Despite these examples, as Monks (2010) lamented, “very few books engage with costume at a critical level;” unfortunately “costume, in one way or another, is frequently looked through, around, or over in theatre scholarship” (Monks, 2010, p. 8; p. 9).

The dearth of scholarly attention paid to costume design has been attributed to several causes. The majority of articles in contemporary theater journals analyze genres of theater [e.g., Biggs’s (2016) article about theater performed by incarcerated women in South Africa] or specific historical moments in time [e.g., Jakubiak’s (2011) article about Polish productions of A Raisin in the Sun in the 1960s]. Those works that focus on the theatrical process often neglect the non-verbal aspects of it. As Monks (2010) explained, theater “is a highly visual art form, but the traditional philosophical approach has been to repress this dimension of performance, in favour of viewing theatre as simply the manifestation of text onstage” (p. 9). It is the text that receives attention in the literature rather than the elements utilized to bring that text to life [e.g., Mohammad’s (2014) analysis of the feminist content in the play The Heidi Chronicles]. In deference to the text, designers can be encouraged to create costumes that actually deflect attention. Designer Somner (1973) shared an experience in which a director observed happily that “the costumes blended into everything else that was on stage and didn’t detract from what he saw,” as if that were the implementation of a successful design concept (p. 161). Clancy (2014) mentioned several times that some productions intend the costumes to be “invisible,” as did theorists Hann and Bech (2014).

Along those lines, Monks (2010) noted the tendency of theater scholars as well as theatergoers and critics “to feel that they should ignore the costumes” (p. 10). She ascribed this phenomenon to “the relationship between stage costume and the wider fashion system”
which can influence researchers “to consider costumes to be a form of frippery, to be far too trivial or playful for serious scholarship” (Monks, 2010, p. 10). This attitude has long been found among scholars beyond the theater discipline, who have “traditionally seen [fashion] as wanton, indulgent, frivolous or trivial” (Crewe, 2008, p. 30). The symbolic interactionist Blumer (1969a) chastised his colleagues for giving no “more than casual concern to the topic” of appearance because of “a false assumption that fashion has only trivial or peripheral significance” (p. 275). He argued that scholars should “question their implicit belief that fashion is a peripheral and relatively inconsequential social happening” given that it “is readily seen to operate in many diverse areas of human group life,” (p. 276; p. 275). Fashion should be taken “seriously and give[n] the attention and study which it deserves and which are so sorely lacking” (Blumer, 1969a, p. 290). However, many years later, scholars still seem to find appearance to be unworthy of investigation.

In addition to the perceived triviality of fashion and costume, their culturally established connection to women may have influenced researchers to disregard them as legitimate fields of study. Monks (2010) concluded that “fashion’s associations with femininity ... make costumes seem like ‘girl’s stuff’: not worthy of serious masculine analysis” (p. 10). As Kaiser (1997) acknowledged, “females are expected to be immersed in the fashion and beauty culture, whereas males are not;” rather, “males are often regarded with suspicion if they seem to pay too much attention to their looks or to fashion” (p. 66). Clancy (personal communication, December 17, 2014) agreed, suggesting that contemporary theater, especially in Europe, “is dominated by university educated white males, who only like heady, intellectual, word-based concepts, and therefore are uncomfortable with the feeling-based world of sumptuous frocks.” She too noticed that many texts about theater
ignore costumes altogether. “There may be perfectly valid reasons for this,” she explained, “but after many years’ reflection I can see no other convincing explanation for the peripheral position of costume design and making than that it is principally the domain of women and gay men” (Clancy & Steer, n.d.). This assertion is at least partially supported by the recent publication of the gender breakdown of the active membership of United Scenic Artists Local 829, the labor union and professional association for entertainment designers, artists, and craftspeople in and near New York City. Friederichs (2015) determined that while 45% of the active membership as a whole is female, 75% of costume designers are women, and in fact, those women get fewer jobs and make less than their male costume design colleagues.\(^{17}\)

Perhaps the emphasis on theater as a genre rather than a process, the primacy of the text in the minds of practitioners, costumes’ relationship to the “trivial” field of fashion, or their linkage to the world of “girls” are the cause of the scarcity of scholarly attention paid to costumes, or perhaps they are the outcome. Regardless, the marginalization of costume design in the academic literature has resulted in a lack of theoretical frameworks that can assist in explaining the process and aspects of theatrical costume design. Recently, scholars have begun to address this situation, resulting in a special 2014 issue of *Scene*, a journal usually dedicated to the critical examination of set design and theatrical spaces. As Hann and Bech (2014) noted in the introduction to the journal issue that “costume is critical. It is critical to making performance, critical to spectatorship, critically overlooked within scholarship” (p. 3).

This project seeks to add to this emerging body of knowledge, especially in light of Creswell’s (2007) assertion that “the strongest and most scholarly rationale for a study…

\(^{17}\) In contrast, 62% of the scenic designers and artists and 77% of the lighting designers in USA 829 are male.
comes from the scholarly literature: a need exists to add to or fill a gap in the literature” (p. 102). In addition, it is hoped, as Cunningham (1989) hoped almost three decades ago, that “an understanding of the process of costuming a production will lead to an increased respect for those who design and produce costumes” (p. xiii).
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the role of historical accuracy in contemporary American theatrical costume design by exploring the experiences and perceptions of Broadway costume designers. Through interviews, this research investigated: (a) the characteristics Broadway costume designers believe are essential for historical accuracy in costume design, (b) the significance they place on historical accuracy for the success of the costume design, and (c) the methods with which they approach and incorporate history into their costume designs for historically set productions. Therefore, this project investigated the following research questions:

1. What is the definition of historical accuracy in terms of theatrical costume design?
2. How do designers perceive the importance of historical accuracy in costume design?
3. What is the process by which theatrical costume designers approach historically set productions?

In order to assess these topics through the perspectives of contemporary theatrical costume designers, a qualitative research methodology was selected. This manner of research is appropriate when examining processes and phenomena to gain insight into “how individuals experience and interact with their social world” (Merriam, 2002, p. 4). Qualitative research focuses on the attitudes and frames of reference held by those under consideration and the meanings they have constructed. As Creswell (2007) described, “besides dialogue and understanding, a qualitative study may fill a void in existing literature, establish a new line of thinking, or assess an issue with an understudied group or population” (p. 102), such as costume designers who have received scant attention in the scholarly literature. This project, by its nature, was not only qualitative, but interpretive by utilizing a
grounded theory methodology in which “the researcher does not start with concepts
determined a priori but rather seeks to allow these to emerge from encounters in ‘the field’”
(“What is interpretive research?” n.d.).

Grounded theory, as noted in Chapter Two, is an approach to qualitative research first
proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). They emphasized the systematic structure of the
technique in order to “derive a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction
grounded in the views of participants in a study” (Creswell, 2003, p. 14). The goal of a
grounded theory study is to link interrelating categories of information arising out of data
collected from the individuals most closely related to the processes of interest and to generate
A researcher employing grounded theory procedures aims to discover a core category that
“recurs frequently, links all the data together, and illustrates the characteristic patterning of
the experience” (Powers & Knapp, 2006, p. 70). In Creswell’s (2007) summary, grounded
theory provides “for the generation of a theory (complete with a diagram and hypotheses) of
actions, interactions, or processes through interrelating categories of information based on
data collected from individuals” (p. 63).

Participants

For participation in a grounded theory study, individuals are selected on the basis of
their common experiences, or as Glaser and Strauss (1967) described, “their theoretical
relevance” (p. 49); “random sampling is not necessary” (p. 64). Instead purposive sampling
is the most suitable technique in identifying potential participants. The purposive strategy is
designed to “sample research participants for the specific perspectives they may have,” those
who can contribute “the greatest possible insight” into the topic of interest (Esterberg, 2002,
p. 93). For this project, the sample consisted of costume designers who have designed at least one production for the Broadway stage. To delimit the sample further, participants were selected only if they self-identify as costume designers even while working in other realms of the theatrical process, such as set design or directing or in other fields like academia or fashion. In choosing participants who all have experience with the same process, the “objective is to maximize the opportunity to understand the different positions taken by members of the social milieu” (Gaskell, 2000, p. 41).

An initial list of potential participants was compiled through an examination of design credits of the Broadway productions of the 2014-2015 theater season, found on the website for the theater magazine Playbill. Further participants were located through the researcher’s own personal associations. Contact information was obtained from a key informant, the administrative director of a leading theatrical design graduate program. This informant also provided the names of several additional designers who met the study’s criteria.

**Data Collection**

Data were collected primarily using interviews, a fundamental and essential method of data collection for grounded theory studies because “intensive interviewing permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25). Interviews are especially valuable when the process under consideration cannot be easily or directly observed, as is the case in this project (Creswell, 2003). After approval of the study by the university’s Human Subjects Committee (Appendix A), an informational letter describing the project was sent to 37 potential participants by email and one was approached by telephone (Appendix B). Those who expressed interest were contacted to schedule interviews. Aided by a fellowship awarded to the researcher by the United States Institute for Theatre Technology
(USITT), face-to-face audio-recorded interviews took place in or near New York City during the course of four weeks. With the exception of one, all interviews were held in the studio, office, or home of the costume designers, while the exception was held in a neutral space provided by the researcher.

A total of 16 costume designers were interviewed, a number supported by qualitative researchers Gaskell (2000) and Rossman and Rallis (1998) as appropriate for “an in-depth portrait of their involvement and views” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 87). This number of interviews permitted saturation, the point at which new information no longer emerges from the data, an essential component of the grounded theory methodology (Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Before each interview began, participants were asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix C). Because of the lack of scholarly research about theatrical costume designers and the prominence of the study participants, the researcher asked for and was granted permission to link participant names to data. When designers were amenable, photographs of the workspace were taken as well.

This study utilized a semi-structured interview approach in which, while certain specific information was requested from all participants, “the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time” (Merriam, 2002, p. 13). This technique allowed participants to delve into topics openly and fully and without excessive guidance from the researcher (Esterberg, 2002). Congruent to the literature pertaining to this method of data collection (McCracken, 1988b), interviews lasted an average of two hours.

The process of interviewing began with what Esterberg (2002) called a face sheet (Appendix D), used to record “demographic information about the interviewee and
information on the set-up of the interview: the name or code number of the interviewee, contact information, the place and time of interview, and so forth” (p. 101). A document named a protocol by Creswell (2007), a guide by Esterberg (2002), and a questionnaire (and termed “indispensable” (p. 24)) by McCracken (1988b) was prepared, listing the main topics and most essential questions to ensure the researcher addressed all subjects with each participant (Appendix E). The first questions were grand tour questions, as described by McCracken (1988b), designed to invite the participant to speak freely about interesting and nonthreatening topics.

This study’s grand tour questions included “How did you first begin costume designing?” and “Can you tell me about your first Broadway production?” Next, general costume topics were addressed with questions including “What do you think is the primary purpose of costume design?” and “What kinds of information do you intend costumes to communicate?” The designer’s approach to historically set productions was then discussed, utilizing questions like “When you design a historical production, what is your first step?” and “What are the variables that can affect your approach to historically set costume design?” The designer’s perceptions of the importance of historical accuracy were addressed through questions such as “What are advantages and drawbacks to historical accuracy?” and “How do you think audiences react to seeing historical accuracy on stage?” Lastly, summative questions were asked, including “What has been your favorite historically set production that you designed?” and “Is there a historically set production you would like to design that you haven’t yet?”

A pilot study was conducted with two academic costume designers who have not designed a Broadway production, but were “selected on the basis of convenience, access, and
geographic proximity” (Creswell, 2007, p. 113). This pilot testing allowed the researcher to refine and revise interview questions and techniques. Data collected from these pilot interviews are not included in this study.

The protocol was modified beginning with the pilot interview and continuing throughout the interview process. Questions were revised, rearranged, and removed, and new questions were introduced based on reactions and responses from previous participants, and certain questions from the face sheet were eliminated based on irrelevancy. In accordance with general qualitative and specific grounded theory research methods (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Esterberg, 2002; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Saldaña, 2013; Shenton, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998), after each interview, the researcher recorded reflective commentary through detailed memos to document procedural decisions, perceptions and impressions of data collection, and notes about patterns emerging in the data.

**Data Analysis**

The data generated in this grounded theory study were professionally transcribed verbatim and were then coded using the ground theory method, a process that involves “categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). Coding, in accordance with Strauss and Corbin’s (1990, 1998) procedures, is described in three stages that do not occur sequentially, but iteratively. *Open coding*, the first stage of grounded theory data analysis, is an extensive process in which units of raw data were named to identify underlying concepts. Themes emerge from analysis of these concepts and are developed into codes that are then applied to the data.

---

18 Both face sheet and protocol underwent multiple revisions during the interview process. The documents in Appendices D and E are the final version of each.
To begin the exploration of the data for concepts as the initial phase of open coding, transcripts from every fourth interview were independently read and analyzed by the researcher and an audit coder (the dissertation advisor) who has a background in design, historical fashion/costume, and qualitative research. Meetings were held after the analysis of each transcript to examine and discuss the concepts they identified. A constant comparative method was employed throughout all stages of coding to continuously contrast incidents both within and between interview transcripts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Resulting from these negotiations, after the transcripts of the first and fifth interviews, a preliminary coding guide or codebook was developed with early coding terms and definitions. As analysis progressed to include the transcripts of the ninth and thirteenth interviews, the coding guide was expanded to include code names, descriptions, examples, and inclusion and exclusion criteria. The collaborative creation of the coding guide after data analysis allowed themes to emerge from the data, and prevented the researcher from imposing concepts determined *a priori* or based on personal bias. Throughout the process, differences in opinions between the researcher and audit coder were discussed to further refine coding techniques and definitions, and the coding guide was reviewed and revised continuously.

After independently employing the emergent coding guide to the fourth transcript, the intercoder reliability rate was calculated as 81%, above the threshold recommended by both Creswell (2007) and Saldaña (2013). Per Creswell’s definition (2007), agreement means the assignment of the same code to a particular segment but not necessarily that the researcher and audit coder coded the same precise units of text,

an ideal that I believe would be hard to achieve because some people code short passages and others, longer passages. Nor did it mean that [coders] bracketed the same lines to include in our code word, another ideal difficult to achieve. (p. 211)
Intercoder agreement was calculated by multiplying the number of coders by the number of agreements (i.e., the number of times coders assigned the same code to the same segment) and dividing by the sum of the total number of codes assigned by the two coders. Though Saldaña (2013) noted “some methodologists question the utility and application of intercoder agreement for qualitative data analysis since the entire process is an interpretive enterprise” (p. 35), calculation of the intercoder agreement rate lends trustworthiness to the findings of this study. Once the appropriate intercoder reliability rate was reached, establishing confidence that coding decisions were accurate and reliable, the remaining transcripts were coded by the primary investigator and reviewed frequently by the auditor.

During open coding, the discovered concepts were then grouped into more abstract categories. When categories were devised, their properties and dimensions were developed. Properties are the attributes or features that define a category. In this analysis schema, within every category are multiple properties, each represented by continuum of dimensions, or “the range along which general properties of a category vary, giving specification to a category and variation to the theory” that emerges (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101).

After themes were classified into categories whose properties and dimensions were identified, the second stage of analysis, axial coding, made connections between categories. Because of the iterative nature of this process, axial coding began with certain concepts while codes were still being developed for others. Axial coding, as Strauss and Corbin (1990) described, is a paradigm enabling researchers “to think systematically about data and to relate them in very complex ways” (p. 99). The focus, they explained,

is on specifying a category (phenomenon) in terms of the conditions that give rise to it; the context (its specific set of properties) in which it is embedded; the action/interactional strategies by which it is handled, managed, and carried out; and the consequences of those strategies. (p. 97)
The purpose is to relate “categories to their subcategories, termed ‘axial’ because coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories as the level of properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). The final coding guide displaying categories, subcategories, themes, minor themes, and subthemes and resulting from open and axial coding can be found in Appendix F.

Selective coding, the third stage in the grounded theory analysis process, is “the process of integrating” categories in order to form a theory grounded in the participants’ own perceptions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 143). In this phase, the central phenomenon, “one which is extensively discussed by the participants or one of particular conceptual interest because it seems central to the process being studied” (Creswell, 2007, p. 160), was identified as the core category, and was systematically related to the other categories and validated with examples from the data. Additional data were gathered through follow-up questions to the interviewees to confirm and fill gaps in the categories, now named subcategories in their relationship to the core category (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The constant comparative process encouraged comparisons across generational, ethnic, and gender characteristics of the participants, though no meaningful differences in perceptions were observed. Constant comparison was also utilized to verify components of the emerging model, to discover cases in support of the theory, and to find illustrative quotes for each component. Based on selective coding and grounded in the data, a substantive theory was developed along with a model to elucidate the interrelationships between the phenomenon, its context, and strategies used to address it. The practice of creating visual representations of emerging theories is “an intrinsic part of grounded theory methods” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 117).
Trustworthiness

Grounded theory studies, like all with a focus on qualitative data, differ from quantitative research projects in many ways, not the least of which are strategies for assessing trustworthiness, “that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). While positivist or quantitative results purport to be objective and generalizable, neither is the intention for a grounded theory study which accepts as a guiding premise that both the participants’ views and the researcher’s interpretations will arise from subjective perspectives. In addition, when “small, nonrandom samples are selected purposefully” to explore a certain process or phenomena as the sample way for this study, it is not possible or even desirable to generalize statistically (Merriam, 2002, p. 28). Despite these limitations, ensuring trustworthiness is a goal in qualitative research, and several strategies were utilized to achieve it.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed “the most widely used criteria for evaluating qualitative” research (Elo et al., 2014, p. 2), using dimensions they called credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. Credibility, similar to internal validity in quantitative research, is meant “to promote confidence that [the data] have accurately recorded the phenomena under scrutiny” (Shenton, 2004, p. 64). One approach, Shenton (2004) advised, is the utilization of established research procedures, such as this study’s adoption of the systematic and structured methods of grounded theory research prescribed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998). The use of pilot testing was another method of increasing credibility “to determine whether the interview questions are suitable for obtaining rich data that answer the proposed research questions” (Elo et al., 2014, p. 4). Another hallmark of credibility is saturation (Merriam, 2002). Saturation is “when no
new information seems to emerge during coding, that is, when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136). For this study, saturation was operationally defined as the point at which no new codes emerged during data analysis, and was reached in this study with analysis of the fourteenth interview. Had new codes representing additional data continued to emerge, more interviews would have been conducted until saturation was reached, thus adding to the credibility of the study.

Demonstrating the expertise of the researcher in the field of study is also a tactic in establishing credibility. As McCracken (1988b) explained, a personal familiarity with the culture under consideration “has the advantage of giving the investigator an extraordinarily intimate acquaintance with the object of study. This acquaintance gives the investigator a fineness of touch and delicacy of insight” (p. 32). As a professional costume designer who worked on Broadway for many years, the researcher has achieved “prolonged engagement” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301) and was able to instill trust in participants, recognize field-specific conditions and contexts, and understand technical jargon. McCracken cautioned, however, that “deep and long-lived familiarity with the culture under study has, potentially, the grave effect of dulling the investigator’s powers of observation and analysis” (p. 32). To combat the possibility, frequent debriefings were held between the researcher and her advisor, who was able to offer external perspectives and alternative viewpoints to increase the study’s credibility (Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability, another dimension of trustworthiness, is akin to objectivity, the idea that “data accurately represent the information that the participants provided and the interpretations of those data are not invented by the inquirer” (Elo et al., 2014, p. 5).
Confirmability was supported using techniques such as the continual negotiations between the research and auditor to discuss diverging opinions and the calculation of the intercoder reliability rate. In addition, quotations from participants to “confirm the connection between the results and data as well as the richness of data” (Elo et al., 2014, p. 7) were extensively utilized when presenting results. The process of member checks also increased the study’s trustworthiness through both confirmability and credibility. A member check, especially important in a study where participant names are attached to results, is the solicitation of feedback from participants about “data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). This allows participants to correct misinterpretations, fill omissions, and react to conclusions. Member checks will be performed with each participant before results of this study are published or disseminated beyond the researcher’s university.

Another dimension of trustworthiness is dependability, or “the stability of data over time and under different conditions” (Elo et al., 2014, p. 2). A dependable study is reliable and can be replicated. Triangulation, the use of multiple sources of data, was a technique utilized to increase dependability, in addition to credibility and conformity. By evaluating data derived from verbal interview transcripts, observational notes regarding participants and their workspaces, and sketches and photographs of participants’ historical designs, this project’s “analysis is likely to be much sounder than if [conclusions] rely on only one source of evidence” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 176). Also important to dependability and confirmability are the reflective memos documenting new avenues of thought and fresh perceptions that were recorded by the researcher after each interview and throughout coding and analysis. These memos create an audit trail, a chronology of the choices and reflections of the research process. A strong audit trail adds to the trustworthiness of the project as it “allows any
observer to trace the course of the research step-by-step via decisions made and procedures described” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72).

Transferability is similar to external validity in quantitative research and is the final dimension in Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) conception of trustworthiness. A transferable study has “findings that can be generalized or transferred to other settings or groups” (Elo et al., 2014, p. 2). Transferability can be assessed through the presentation of “thick description” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 219), especially in terms of participants and context. By utilizing these “operational techniques that the [researcher] can use to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 219), it is hoped that the grounded substantive theory and model illustrating the relationship of historical accuracy and costume design will be accepted as trustworthy.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The previous chapter presented the data collection and coding procedures for a grounded theory study of the role of historical accuracy in contemporary American theater. This chapter offers the results, beginning with an explanation of the characteristics of the study’s participants, followed by an exploration of the research questions that guided this study:

1. What is the definition of historical accuracy in terms of theatrical costume design?
2. How do designers perceive the importance of historical accuracy in costume design?
3. What is the process by which theatrical costume designers approach historically set productions?

This chapter provides answers to these questions, using the words of the study’s participants to support conclusions drawn. In the following chapter, these results will be interpreted, integrated, and presented in a synthesized model.

Profile of Participants

This study’s participants, all of whom granted permission for their names to be linked with their responses, are listed in Table 1. Sixteen Broadway costume designers living in or near New York City were interviewed for this project. Of the 16, 12 were women, or 75%, equal to the proportion of women registered as costume designers with USA 829, the entertainment design union (Friederichs, 2015, p. 2). The designers’ ages ranged from 36 to 84. With a mean age of 55, half of the sample was born before 1960 and half were born after. Fourteen of the participants were white and two were Asian, one born in Korea and one in China, but both living and working in New York for many years.
Table 1. Description of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>First credit as Broadway costume designer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gregg Barnes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1997, <em>Side Show</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy Clark</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2012, <em>Chaplin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy Christensen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2005, <em>Souvenir</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candice Donnelly</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1987, <em>Fences</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory Gale</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1999, <em>Band in Berlin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jess Goldstein</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1980, <em>Charlie and Algernon</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Hilferty</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1980, <em>A Lesson From Aloes</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constance Hoffman</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2000, <em>The Green Bird</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Hould-Ward</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1984, <em>Sunday in the Park with George</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Maresca</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2015, <em>Hand to God</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa Snider-Stein</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2002, <em>I’m Not Rappaport</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Roth</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1958, <em>Maybe Tuesday</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita Yavich</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2003, <em>Anna in the Tropics</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paloma Young</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2012, <em>Peter and the Starcatcher</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the participants earned bachelor’s degrees, with half majoring in theater or costume design. The other undergraduate majors included art, history, literature, psychology, and fashion. Fourteen of the 16 designers earned a master’s degree of fine arts (MFA), the terminal degree in the field. Seven of the MFAs were granted by Yale University and four by New York University, both considered among the country’s best theater graduate programs (Appelo, 2015; Peterson, 2015). At the time of the interviews, the average number of Broadway shows designed by participants in the sample was 16.75, with the most being 80 and the fewest being one (“Internet Broadway,” n.d.). Half designed their first Broadway show before 2000, and half since. In addition to their work as costume designers, seven were faculty members in theater departments of New York-area institutions of higher education. Several participants also design scenery or direct as well as designing costumes. Within the
realm of costume design, Broadway was only one venue for these designers, whose credits of regional, national, and international productions include opera, dance, film, and television.

**Definition of Historical Accuracy**

The purpose of this study is to understand the role of historical accuracy in contemporary American theatrical costume design, but before understanding can be achieved, a definition of historical accuracy for costumes must be established. As none of the costume literature reviewed for this study put forth such a definition, the designers were asked for their perceptions. Upon analysis of their responses, it was determined that Hillestad’s (1980) appearance taxonomy provided a valuable framework for thematic interpretation.

In his article, “The Underlying Structure of Appearance,” Hillestad (1980) posited that appearance is “a total concept” that “involves the human body as well as the coverings and embellishments placed upon it” (p. 117). The two interlocked “structural units of appearance” are dress and the body (p. 120). Hillestad created a model of appearance (see Figure 2) illustrating a taxonomy of the subunits encompassed by these structural units.

Dress, Hillestad (1980) submitted, is made up of articles of clothing and adornment. These articles are in turn made up of three elements, or “resources from which articles of clothing and articles of adornment are derived” (Hillestad, 1980, p. 118). The resources include materials, defined as “the physical substances which elicit visual and tactile responses, processes, and techniques” (Hillestad, 1980, p. 119). The terms “dress” and “appearance” are often defined inconsistently across sources. For instance, Eicher and Roach-Higgins (1992), in a widely cited definition, included “supplements added to” the body as well as “body modifications, from skin coloring to perfumes and hairdress” (p. 13).
Figure 2. Hillestad's (1980) appearance model illustrating “a taxonomy for identifying various units involved in the structure of appearance.” (p. 118)
However, though Hillestad considered cosmetics and perfumes as articles of adornment – and thus dress, skin and hair color and texture are elements of body expression, influencing the body, the second structural unit of appearance. According to Hillestad, the body “operates as a vehicle for dress” (p. 119) and is comprised of body forms, body surfaces, and body motions. Additional elements of body expression are the size and shape of body forms and sub-units of body motion.

Formed by these elements, appearance is therefore “the result of interrelated factors of dress and the body” (Hillestad, 1980, p. 126). While their definitions of dress diverged, Eicher and Roach-Higgins (1992) predominantly agreed with Hillestad (1980) that appearance is made up of “body features, movements, and positions, as well as the visible body modifications and supplements of dress” (p. 13). Because Hillestad’s model offers such clear explanations of the units that form appearance, and because those units so closely align with participant responses, his definitions were most applicable to this study.

Dress

When asked about historical accuracy, the designers in this study consistently began with dress, particularly articles of clothing, just as Hillestad’s (1980) taxonomy does. For both men’s and women’s clothes, the length and width of the hem and the placement and shape of the sleeve were regarded as paramount if adhering to historical accuracy. Above all, though, the designers identified historically accurate undergarments as the primary articles of clothing necessary in any attempt at a historically accurate costume. As Gregory Gale said, to achieve historical accuracy, “you have to get those corset shapes right.”

Hillestad (1980) defined articles of adornment as those providing embellishments, like “jewelry, cosmetics, and certain grooming aids” (p. 118). In fact, in addition to other
articles of adornment, designers mentioned designers these three specific items. Susan Hilferty observed how many individual articles of adornment were involved in creating a historically accurate costume, “from the jewelry to the gloves to the purses to the hats, men and women, the ties, all of those things.” Gregory Gale added, “Shoes and gloves and hats, which, please. Period accessories? Sign me up!” He continued, “Makeup needs to be correct. And grooming? Super important.” Appropriate grooming allows not only the “different eyebrow shapes” seen throughout history (Linda Cho), but also “facial hair, depending on either having it or not having it” (Jess Goldstein).

As Hillestad (1980) indicated in his taxonomy, the articles of dress that interact to form appearance must be considered in terms of the elements of materials, processes, and techniques. Historically accurate materials were recognized as highly consequential in creating historically accurate costumes and designers noted that each historical era has favored textiles, influenced by taste and technology. Many participants agreed with Tracy Christensen that a historically accurate costume will utilize only “what fabrics actually existed, what fabrics would they really have had…what weaving techniques would they have had.” The accuracy of a historical costume was further evaluated in relation to the fabric’s weight. Akin to other designers, Jess Goldstein contended:

You have to use certain fabrics to create a certain silhouette. So sometimes you can’t do something out of a very light – like on a suit, for example. The men’s period suit, you can’t use those very thin modern wools because it won’t look like a period suit.

Of course, materials used in garments are not limited to textiles. The designers considered closures to be a critical period indicator. To Tracy, concern with the accuracy of fabric was not exceeded by “how clothes were fastened onto the body, pins, buttons, when were zippers invented. Not just when were they invented, when were they actually being
used and in what kind of garments.” Gregg Barnes recalled how powerful inaccurate closures were to him personally: “I remember sitting in the theater thinking, ‘If one more woman turns around with a big old zipper up the back of her dress, I’m going to go postal.’”

The *processes* and *techniques* next displayed in Hillestad’s (1980) taxonomy were also applicable to the definition of a historically accurate costume. To achieve historical accuracy, authentic sewing patterns, or those drafted from garments of the time, must be used and construction methods honored. As Sydney Maresca said, “Knowing where you’re putting a shoulder seam in the period changes everything.” She continued, “Clothing construction wasn’t as good through most of history. Clothing science, like pattern making science, wasn’t great through most of history. So when we have the impulse to make things look fabulous on people, sometimes that’s historically inaccurate.”

Another technique that acts as a period indicator is color. Several participants observed that historical eras have identifiable color palettes. Again, Sydney Maresca offered explanations, linking color to both industry and cultural aesthetics.

Color has a lot to do with [historical accuracy]. The technology of when certain dyes are available dictate what kind of colors you can have in a period. And the taste of color for a period, what people like to see, what feels like, you know, what do the Victorians love about color? What do we love about color? What do the Medievals love about color?

To achieve historical accuracy, articles of clothing and adornment must be designed and constructed accurately, using historically accurate materials, processes, and techniques.

**The Body**

In addition to dress, Hillestad’s (1980) taxonomy of appearance incorporated the *body*, made up of body forms, surfaces, and motions, each of which are germane to historically accurate costumes. *Body forms* are generated by corresponding elements of body expression,
shape and size, and as did Hillestad, participants in this study noted that characteristics of body forms changed “from one socio-culture or period of time to another” (p. 117). For instance, many designers remarked on the evolution of the optimal body shape over time, often due to changes in the location and proportion of the bust, waist, and hips for women, and shoulders, waist, and hips for men. It is possible, therefore, for visibly inaccurate body forms to affect the accuracy of the complete costume. Sydney Maresca pointed specifically to “body size. Like, how fashionable looks to us now looks like a famine victim to all of history.” To create a historically accurate costume, designers asserted that the person wearing it must conform to the beauty standards of the particular era.

The undressed body is influential in the achievement of historical accuracy, but generally articles of dress are utilized to alter the body’s shape to achieve a period’s ideal silhouette. The silhouette is the outline of the dressed body and was singled out by the study’s designers as the most crucial characteristic in achieving historical accuracy. The undergarments mentioned previously were instrumental to this process. Constance Hoffman explained how such articles of dress on the body create the silhouette:

We think of the 19th century and we think of bustles. Or we think of the 18th century and we think of panniers. So that’s the first thing that comes across, still connected to silhouette because it’s all connected to silhouette.

As Anita Yavich said, “you have the silhouette and then all the elements will go into support that silhouette.”

Moreover, Hillestad (1980) referred to body surfaces, made up of the elements of skin and hair colors and textures. As with body forms, this unit of appearance can be particular to historical time periods. Linda Cho specifically commented on the historical accuracy of pale skin when she remarked that until recently, fashionable people “they weren’t basking in the
sun and all that kind of thing.” *Hairstyle* was also frequently described by designers as integral to historical accuracy. In fact, Anita Yavich was very emphatic about its importance: “If you have the wrong hair, I don’t care what your clothes look like. You’re screwed.”

The texture component of body surfaces can further be affected by articles of dress, according to the designers. Many called attention to garment *fit*, a feature impacted by the processes and techniques of the garment’s construction. Historically accurate fit, the designers in this sample explained, could add textures to the historical costume where contemporary clothes have none. Candice Donnelly observed that before the twentieth century, “the header on the sleeve was much more shallow so that you got all kinds of wrinkling through there.” Gregg Barnes noted that in the eighteenth century, “you had to sit on a horse. You have to straddle the horse. You’re going to have a certain amount of fabric across the seat of your pants,” which leads to folds and bumps. “Lumpy” was the word used by Tracy Christensen. To achieve a historically accurate costume, these historically accurate processes must be employed to create historically accurate surfaces.

Hillestad’s (1980) final component of the body in terms of its influence on appearance is *body motion*, the elements of which are *sub-units of body motion*, like “posture, gait, gestures, and facial expressions” (Hillestad, 1980, p. 121). Designers in this study agreed that the body’s movements were essential in achieving historical accuracy, though they believed historically accurate motions were almost entirely reliant on historically accurate articles of clothing. For instance, footwear was a prime target when evaluating accuracy: “Shoes are very important, because how people stand is so important” (Anita Yavich). Sydney Maresca linked shoes to movement as well: “You can’t walk in a corset in [modern high-heeled] shoes. It makes the hoop wobble in a really inappropriate way.” Ann
Roth spoke of both shoes and corsets, insisting that performers “get into it, get with it because that’s the way you stand and that’s your posture and all that.” As Gregg Barnes affirmed, “it’s a body language thing.”

In analyzing the perceptions of the designers in this study, it became clear that a historically accurate costume is dependent not solely on dress or the body, but on the interrelationship of the two. Paloma Young summarized the necessary components and their connection to each other and to the overall appearance:

True historical accuracy would be: can you make a garment – and a whole outfit, so that includes undergarments, because that’s going to change the way the way the actor holds their bodies, and findings, like closures, the way that you close the garments, zippers, hooks and eyes, buttons, hairstyle, makeup. But if you made that garment, sent it in a time machine back in time and you put it in a closet and then like a hundred years later, one of those people writing those books about how these clothes are made looks at the rack of clothes and is like, “These are all dresses from 1875. There’s not a single piece that’s different about that dress.” If you could put them up next to each other and not be able to tell the difference, that would be a truly historically accurate garment.

Paloma’s scenario is descriptive, but does not serve as a definition. Instead, Hillestad’s (1980) definition of appearance, depicted in the model of his taxonomy, provided a foundation for a definition of a historically accurate costume. Just as “the concept of appearance is illustrated as a major heading to which other factors [i.e., dress and the body] contribute,” (Hillestad, 1980, p. 117), a historically accurate costume is comprised of those same historically accurate factors. In sum, for a costume to be considered historically accurate, all elements displayed in Hillestad’s model must be authentic to the period the costume represents. Thus, this analysis resulted in the following definition:

*A historically accurate costume is one in which historically accurate articles made using historically accurate materials and processes are assembled about a historically accurate body.*
Importance of Historical Accuracy

With a definition of historical accuracy in theatrical costume design established, its importance can now be considered. Three major classifications emerged from the data: importance of history, the primacy of the narrative, and the conditionality of historical accuracy. This last theme includes the minor themes of the beneficiality, responsibility, and impossibility of historical accuracy (see Figure 3).

![Table: Importance of Historical Accuracy]

- Importance of history
- Primacy of the narrative
- Conditionality of accuracy
  - Beneficiality
  - Responsibility
  - Impossibility

Figure 3. The importance of historical accuracy: Category, themes, and minor themes.

The Importance of History

Among the designers, the presentation of history, accurately or not, was uniformly accepted as an essential function of theater. Historically set productions create meaning through the presentation of “something that’s very specific to a time period” (Gregory Gale), and can include factual occurrences or “this thing that happened with these people at this time” (Tracy Christensen). Fictional situations, such as “some issue with women’s rights that can only be told during the suffragette period, for instance, that wouldn’t necessarily make sense in New York City 2015,” can be equally significant (Linda Cho).

As to why a presentation of suffragists would be important at all, Teresa Snider-Stein offered a perspective shared by many of the designers:
I guess Shakespeare figured out, if he set things in a historical time period, people were looking at it from a distance. And sometimes you can’t recognize problems in your own day because they’re too close. If you set them somewhere else, it’s possible to get your message across in a way where, in a contemporary, something would be blocked.

As communication with the audience is a central objective in Western theater, “blocking” the message is to be avoided.

Designers also noted that past periods were often perceived as romantic and beautiful. Paloma Young explained how this idealized concept of the past can be utilized:

There’s sort of the escape, escapism element to it, like we just want to see something beautiful. And I think that we really romanticize the past, you know, audiences of all kinds. And that we imagine it was an easier time, or a better time, or a more civil time…. Like, cultural thinking is that, long ago, things were more beautiful and things were better. And so we’re sort of giving them this like elegantly wrapped package to digest and enjoy.

And then you have this political, it’s like the escapism then goes back into this sort of secret political, emotional storytelling that a lot of great theater does. And that’s like, “We gave you this beautiful package and inside is like, we’ve secretly laced the cake, the beautiful cake that's inside.” At first it kind of just lulls you off and then you’re like, “Oh my God! It’s the legacy of race in America. Aaah!”

By presenting a historical era on stage, theater-makers can communicate both enjoyable and nonthreatening beauty as well as politically or socially charged messages, making it a valuable tool in the theater-maker’s toolbox.

The Primacy of the Narrative

History is presented on stage when the production’s narrative calls for it. The narrative – or what the designers generally referred to as the story – is not just the text of the production, but the text as read through the lens of the production concept; productions of the same text customarily present different narratives. To illustrate this point, Susan Hilferty discussed when she designed two productions of Shakespeare’s King Lear back to back:
People said to me, “Is it going to be hard to –?” No! I was amazed myself at how completely different each of the productions were. Even though the text was basically identical, but in both cases, we were telling a different story. The essential part of what we wanted to tell drove it, so you don’t even worry about it being the same thing, because there’s no way it can be the same, because you’re starting from a different place, different cultures, so it led to different clothing choices. Different King Lear in one and King Lear in the other. Completely different point of view. No confusion.

The designers were emphatic: the narrative is of prime importance. They further agreed that the purpose of costume design is not to reproduce historical artifacts but “to facilitate telling a story… If you want historically accurate, there’s a few drawers of stuff up at the Metropolitan Museum” (Ann Hould-Ward). Susan Hilferty recognized the importance of understanding the play’s period, but “I’m a storyteller so …my goal is never just to be historically accurate.” That would be nonsensical, she continued, because:

When you’re in the theater, you know. You just know in your bones that you're not in that place, or you’re not in a place that is. You don’t think, you don’t really believe you’ve gone back in time. Frankly, I always use the word context. So, because you’ve got the context of being in a room with an audience member, you’re watching the set transform, you know in your bones that there is a lack of reality, even though you can feel, you believe you’ve been transported.

Susan admired historically accurate productions, like Jenny Tiramani’s, as “really interesting,” but “to me, the limitations are that the idea of historical accuracy is their goal, not storytelling.” Jess Goldstein agreed; “it’s not so much about you’re trying, you’re not showing life in 1504, what that looked like. It’s not about that. Shakespeare is about universal themes.” Gregg Barnes noted categorically, “we’re not historians… we’re stealing, really, to tell a story.”

**Conditionality of Accuracy**

Despite declaring allegiance to the narrative over historical accuracy, the designers did not reject it indiscriminately. Many of them still regarded historical accuracy as a worthwhile goal and pointed to the beneficiality of attempting it and the responsibility that
comes with presenting a culture with which the audience may not be familiar. Yet virtually all of them questioned the achievability of historical accuracy, believing that it is ultimately impossible to accomplish.

**The beneficiality of accuracy.** In the presentation of history, the designers believed that accuracy can be a very powerful device. The words “honesty,” “integrity,” and “veracity” were used to describe the effect historical accuracy has not only on the costumes, but on the entire world portrayed on stage. Tracy Christensen said:

> I feel like it’s important that it be right because these people are a product of their time. They’re struggling with things that are crucial to that time and place and … it gives the right storytelling. I mean when you see someone wearing a real properly executed suit from a certain period… you were there. You were right there and then.

Amy Clark cautioned that “There’s so many beautiful differences in these time periods and I think when you start to just abandon them, they all start to look the same. So I think it is important to stay as accurate as you can.” Teresa Snider-Stein proposed that when a production is historically set, “it would be necessary to honor that time period in order to tell the story so that we don’t pull the audience out of the story by making mistakes or making things look odd.”

The concern about confusing or alienating the audience and hindering their immersion into the production’s world was common. Sydney Maresca said, “I find historical accuracy very important and can ruin the play if the period isn’t done well.” She argued that she finds herself bewildered should a performer appear adorned in inaccuracies:

> It's like, I can’t think about anything else. It’s over. You know, you lost me, I have no trust in you anymore, I can’t hear the story, I can’t understand it…. You lost me, you lost me. I no longer have trust in this story that’s being told to me.

William Ivey Long mirrored Sydney when he lamented, if “the hair is today, 2014-15 blown-dry hair, the makeup is today’s street makeup, how can I take it seriously? How can I believe
these people?” They believe that elements that disturb their own connection with a production would similarly disturb other audience members. Through their words, it became evident that the designers subscribe to the Aristotelian model of theater. For them, the ultimate goal is the creation of a complete world that will “make that separation between the audience and what’s happening on stage sort of melt away” in order to “communicate with the audience and have them be affected” (Paloma Young).

As an example of the achievement of historical accuracy, there was one designer to whom many of the designers in this study pointed. In 2013, Jenny Tiramani, the former Director of Theatre Design at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, principal of the London-based School of Historical Dress, and “goddess of our business” (William Ivey Long), brought historically accurate versions of *Twelfth Night* and *Richard III* to Broadway. Her designs won the Tony Award and are considered “the most accurate, mind-exploding costumes I’ve ever seen in Shakespeare” (William Ivey Long). In interviews, Tiramani spoke about the merits of accuracy and its importance to audiences: “People don't want that received idea of the past that has come down to us in Hollywood films. They want a sense of what was it really like” (Blake, 2015, para. 14). “In design,” Tiramani maintained, “truth is always more interesting than fiction. Truth is getting as close to the historical details as you can” (Blake, 2015, para. 2). Susan Hilferty agreed that costumes – in fact, all components of the theatrical experience – must be “informed by a truth” that comes from accuracy. For these designers, historical accuracy provides the foundation of a fully realized and authentic world.

The responsibility of accuracy. Beyond presenting the audience “with something that is correct so that they’re just getting the best possible experience” (Tracy Christensen), some designers felt an obligation to the Aristotelian world portrayed on stage. Ann Hould-
Ward said, “I feel massively responsible for whatever is the period and the place and the time, the existence of the people who were living through whatever made this author want to reflect on and write about it.” Sydney Maresca agreed, “It’s my job to carry the knowledge of this period and share it with other people. I feel responsible for it.”

Interestingly, designers who might be less inclined to attempt strict historically accuracy argued for accuracy in other non-historical areas. As Teresa Snider-Stein said, “I don’t know if there’s a time period but there are certain subjects that if you screw up, if you mess, if you don’t do them right, people are insulted or angry.” She paid special tribute to sensitive subjects, like religion and bloodshed. Teresa explained, “There are certain times that have more of an impact, perhaps on other people. I mean, there’s been several genocides, Rwanda, the Armenians, places in Uganda.” Along with the Holocaust, Teresa continued, “those kinds of things become more important because of what they mean,” and they are “definitely something that you don’t want to trivialize.” Other designers agreed, also pointing to genocides, especially the Holocaust, as deserving of particular fidelity to accuracy “to honor the historical time, the lives that were lost, the whole energy of that” (Gregg Barnes).

Moreover, designers were conscientious about other cultures: “Anytime there is a community, especially that is not often represented, I feel like there is a responsibility to be more careful and represent it specifically, to not just generalize who they are. I think that would be a mistake” (Linda Cho). Military uniforms were a third area in which designers felt beholden to accuracy. Tracy Christensen cautioned:

It’s a very important thing to remember when you’re handling anything that has to do with uniforms or any military service, that there will be someone out there who knows if you’ve made something up or screwed something up and they will have no problem voicing that. And it’s disrespectful.
Yet Constance Hoffman argued: “I get it, but on the other hand, it’s not necessarily always something I’m going to care about equally.”

The impossibility of accuracy. Some designers offered a compelling justification for not revering historical accuracy: it is impossible to achieve. In fact, even designers who promoted its benefits believe its impossibility to be true. Several explanations were given, such as changes in body shape from “malnutritioned aristocrat” (Constance Hoffman), and the lack of access to historically accurate resources, “oftentimes for good reason, like the dyes used had arsenic in them so we don’t use those anymore” (Paloma Young). In addition, most of the designers agreed that merely being alive in an era other than the one they wanted to represent made attempts at genuine accuracy futile. Sydney Maresca explained, “it’s impossible because we always exist in the time that we exist in, so everything we are seeing in history is always through the lens of right now.”

The lens to which Sydney referred is the cultural perspective from which all members of a culture view the world. It is “reflexively imposed” (Hassel, 2014, p. 6), and it causes different cultures to experience their reality differently (Erwin & Bialek, 2015). It is so omnipresent as to often go unnoticed and “this lens can distort knowledge that is generated from different cultural orientations” (Hassel, 2014, p. 6).

Because of this distortion, the designers, as well as much of the costume literature, advised that the lens through which contemporary people view the past makes historical accuracy impossible to achieve. Instead, designers create historical costumes that conform to contemporary beauty standards. This process can be deliberate or unconscious. For instance, Susan Hilferty noted that, despite her efforts, the elements that differentiate one era from another had unintentionally influenced her designs for historically set productions.
I’ve witnessed in all of my attempts to create something that’s really, truly period, when I did it in the 80s and when I did it in the 90s and when I did it in the aughts and I do it now, I look back at the work, I go, “Oh! As hard as I tried, it still feels 80s.” “As hard as I’ve tried, it feels 90s.” (Susan Hilferty)

Jess Goldstein remembered being more methodical in adapting historical accuracy to contemporary ideals of beauty: “in the 1980s, every period you would do, you had to put a little shoulder pad in. We were doing a play showing the 1890s and everything had to have a little shoulder pad.” These designers incorporated elements of contemporary appearance to align historical costumes more closely with contemporary beauty ideals.

To further explain the phenomenon of the contemporary lens, several designers referred to one particular film:

_Gone With the Wind_ [made in 1939] always blows me away, because you believed it was real when they did it and then you look at Rhett Butler’s suit and go, “Oh my God, that shoulder padding! Oh my God, that stripe! Where did that come from?” It came right from the period. (Susan Hilferty)

Sydney Maresca agreed, saying that in _Gone With the Wind_, “every choice is a very late 1930s choice, with an eye on the 1860s.” She, like almost every designer in this study, regarded historical accuracy as impossible.

Despite understanding the consequences of the contemporary lens and its effect on achieving historical accuracy, most of the designers in this study still attempt it when the production calls for it. As Anita Yavich pointed out, it is not that she is “against or for historical accuracy, it just depends on what the story is about.” Tracy Christensen observed:

There are times where it’s incredibly impactful for it to be accurate and there’s times where that really doesn’t support what’s being put forth. So it has to be taken on a case-by-case basis like everything else. It doesn’t just have a blanket application but I do believe that you have to start with history.
Identifying the conditional “times” when historical accuracy is “impactful” is contingent on many factors. As virtually every designer answered in response to whether historical accuracy is significant: “It depends.”

**Approach to Historically Set Productions**

A costume designer’s approach to a historically set production begins with consideration of factors related to the individual production, which leads to four iterative strategies (*incubation, research, role-playing, and historical manipulation*, discussed in the next section) to incorporate the conditions and constraints of the factors into a cohesive costume design. Analysis of the interview data revealed historically set production factors classified into three themes: *applicability, attainability, and performability.*

**Production Factors Influencing Historical Accuracy**

When costume designers approach a production, the first stage is the synthesis of the production’s many factors, each a component upon which the importance of historical accuracy depends. The production factors, categorized as *applicability, attainability,* and *performability* (see Figure 4), are externally imposed on the designer and often predate the designer’s involvement with the production. The designer may have input, but their final parameters are decided by others. For a historically set production, the factors that emerged through analysis of the data guide the design’s level of adherence to historical accuracy.

Applicability, or whether historical accuracy applies to a given production, is comprised of two minor themes: production aesthetics and cultural aesthetics. For this study, production aesthetics refer to the theatrical framework, the text, the production concept, and the scenic design of the historically set production. Cultural aesthetics include beauty ideals and codes specific to the culture in which the production is presented. Attainability evaluates
the capacity of the historically set production to achieve historical accuracy. The factors that influence attainability are resources like labor, time, and budget, and the accessibility of historically accurate bodies. The last theme, performability, indicates the ability of performers to accomplish the stage movements required.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRODUCTION FACTORS</th>
<th>- Applicability</th>
<th>- Attainability</th>
<th>- Performability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Production aesthetics</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The theatrical framework</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Labor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The text</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The production concept</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Budget</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The scenic design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cultural aesthetics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Beauty ideals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Performer movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cultural codes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4. Production factors: Category, themes, minor themes, and subthemes.*

**Applicability.** Applicability refers to the relevance of historical accuracy given the aesthetic contexts of the production and the culture in which the production is presented. Designers must evaluate the aesthetic factors and consider whether historical accuracy would profitably apply.

**Production aesthetics.** Each theatrical production is a unique piece of art, set within a specific framework and involving the collaboration of an artistic team. The contributions of these team members as well as the framework must be weighed when appraising the applicability of historical accuracy.

*The theatrical framework.* The first facet of any theatrical production is that it is, in fact, an act of theater. Many of the designers drew comparisons between film and theater, noting that historical accuracy might be more applicable for the former than the latter. As
Constance Hoffman contended, “We’re more intimate with film or we feel we are. I mean we’re intimate in a different way with theater, but usually it’s about at least twenty feet between an audience member and an actor.” This distance might invalidate the use of certain historically accurate elements. Gregg Barnes gave an example of such a case that he noticed in a film set in the 1920s:

They weren’t afraid to put on a cloche hat and pull it down so that there’s no eyes in the frame… And I thought, “You know in the theater, we would never let that happen.” “I can’t see her face! I can’t see her face. Put the hat on the back of her head! I can’t see, cut the hat!”

Indeed, the difficulty of utilizing historically accurate hats on stage was a frequent concern among the designers.

In addition to headwear, a historically accurate costume incorporates a myriad of small details, which some designers felt might not be suited for a theatrical production. The visibility of those details was an issue; “when you’re creating something on stage, they’re stage costumes, and they need to work on stage. They need to translate that story and character much further than a film costume would, because it’s in a large open space” (Gregory Gale). The size of the venue in which the production is presented was a prevalent consideration for the designers. Gregory’s discussion of costume stagecraft continued when he asked, “Is the audience sitting right on top of it? Is it a very large modern with three balconies?” He admitted – but “only if you hold my feet to the fire” – that in situations where audiences were very distant from the stage, a small detail could be eliminated:

Like, you’re doing a big nineteenth century play. The women's dresses are all going to be floor length. Do they all have to have exactly absolutely perfect period shoes? It would be wonderful. If that had to slide a little, well I guess that wouldn’t be the worst thing in the world, because you may not see it. Do all of their pantaloons have to be absolutely the most pristine, perfect pantaloon? Well I guess not. We’re not going to really see it, right? (Gregory Gale)
Several designers noted that historically accurate fabric might not be worthwhile because “I’m only going to be able to get to see that fabric from a certain distance, so I just have to believe it from the distance I see it from” (Sydney Maresca). Tracy Christensen was blunt about how the theatrical framework “trumped fussing about like, would these buttons have existed in 19...? Who cares, you know? They have to be in this giant space.”

The way in which buttons and other closures work can also impact the historical accuracy of a costume, especially if it must be part of a quick change, when a costume must be removed and another donned in very little time. Teresa Snider-Stein explained that quick changes could affect historical accuracy “because historically, it usually took people a little while to get dressed and they didn't have Velcro and zippers. So we have to find ways of making things work magically in some ways.” Ann Roth, designing a large musical set in the 1920s, had similar thoughts in terms of other historically accurate clothing choices:

It just has me sitting there saying, “This is what I want to do, but how?” Just rolling down one pair of stockings and putting on another color, it’s huge, and I don't think there's ever more than thirty-five seconds to do it.

Jenny Tiramani (2000) offered one method of completing a historically accurate quick change when she remarked that a dresser “cut the laces of [a performer’s] bodice during every performance” (p. 122). This approach would certainly remove the costume from the performer swiftly, but would require the laces be replaced every time, thus creating another problem to be solved. The development of a costume that can facilitate and withstand a quick change is an issue in theater, not in film or television.

Neither is durability, at least not to the same extent. In theater, a costume must “hold up for eight performances a week, so you have to compromise” (Susan Hilferty). Several
designers noted the beauty and accuracy of the costumes in the BBC series *Downton Abbey* and how they are achieved by using historical artifacts. Susan continued:

> When I look at the British television series where I’m jealous because almost all, you look at those clothes and you know they’re using real clothes. They’re starting with the real clothes and then they’re adding things to it, but the real spine of it is real. In theater, it’s so hard to do that, because the clothes disintegrate.

Coinciding with Susan, William Ivey Long admired for *Downton Abbey*’s use of artifacts as costumes, which is possible because “they just have to do it once.” By comparison, a theater costume may be in service for years and worn hundreds of times.

The contrast in number of performances between film or television and theater can also affect the importance of *care and maintenance* when handling historically accurate costumes. Once a production has opened, the costumes become the responsibility of the wardrobe department, charged with maintaining the costumes’ appearance as the designer intended. Several of the designers recognized the complicated wardrobe requirements for Jenny Tiramani’s Shakespearean productions. For instance, “all those ruffs that are completely hand ironed pleat by pleat, and pinned in place rather than sewn in place” (Ann Hould-Ward). William Ivey Long observed that “it had to be oak stands on which the starched collars would be laid to rest at night, things stuck in, steam, bababababababa. Had to be oak. Couldn’t be pine, pine still leeches. Oak doesn’t.” In the vast majority of Western productions, Ann Hould-Ward candidly asserted, “we don’t do that stuff.” Because of issues with visibility, efficiency, durability, and maintenance, truly historically accurate details such as those in Jenny Tiramani’s productions are beyond the scope of most theatrical productions. Yet Candice Donnelly noted “a tendency in theater to make everything very film-like and very real,” so the fact of the theatrical framework does not immediately negate the applicability of historical accuracy.
The text. The textual component of a theatrical production – the script or libretto – will influence the applicability of historical accuracy, because, as Ann Roth explained, “costumes are what the literature demands. Nothing else.” The style of the text was often mentioned as affecting historical accuracy, because “the more dramatic the piece or the more naturalistic the piece, the more naturalistic and real I want the costumes” (Paloma Young).

The designers made it clear that the legacies of Realism and Naturalism, the nineteenth century art movements that emphasized presenting truth and authenticity, are very present in contemporary American theater. Virtually all of them used either one term or the other – or both, like Paloma did – to describe the style of texts for which historical accuracy would be most applicable.

Many designers distinguished between plays and musicals or operas, especially in relations to their relative realism and naturalism. Constance Hoffman noted historically accurate costumes might not be applicable “in opera, because the language kind of removes us from any kind of naturalism, because there’s all these, the language and the music and so many factors are heightened.” Others agreed, but not Susan Hilferty, who argued that the format of operas and musicals is not enough to invalidate the prospect of historical accuracy. She stated:

I do not believe that you can declare that opera clothes are different than musical clothes that are different than clothes that you do in a play or in a movie. There are certain things that you could use to define the various medium and what the demands are, but I don’t believe there are opera clothes or musical clothes or drama clothes, comedy clothes, or film clothes… This is the script, this is my point of view to the script, and that’s how I get there instead of, “Oh, these clothes have to be bigger.”

Beyond the stylistic format of the text, many designers discussed how the characters within it could affect the applicability of historical accuracy. Amy Clark observed that “each character kind of presents its own problems … and what wins? Does strict historical accuracy
win in this moment or do I just need these things to be this color?” Interestingly, four designers described this dilemma in terms of the 1895 Oscar Wilde farce, *The Importance of Being Earnest*. For instance, Anita Yavich noted that the intimidating “Lady Bracknell would be super in the perfect period, whereas Cecily might be more playful with certain things because she likes to roll around, read everywhere.” Jess Goldstein concurred, saying:

> Some of the more flamboyant and outrageous aspects of a period, for example, the extra large leg-of-mutton sleeves of women's 1890s dresses, I might scale them down for some characters, like Cecily in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. But then, of course, I might absolutely use them in their most extreme for Lady Bracknell.

The essence of this reasoning is that the degree of historical accuracy must suit the character. As Teresa Snider-Stein cautioned, “if you don’t get the character feel right, you can have it historically correct but somehow, it’s still, it’s wrong still.”

*The production concept.* Within the theatrical framework, the text is the first and overarching aesthetic element that must be appraised when evaluating historical accuracy’s applicability, but it is presented onstage through the schema of the production concept. While designers can contribute to the production concept’s development, ultimately it is devised and imparted by the director. Then the costume designer is charged with translating it into garments, and its relationship with historical accuracy will definitely affect how enthusiastically it is attempted.

Designers reported many occurrences of a production concept reflecting a general *timelessness*, the “director’s desire to make something ‘then and now,’” for instance. The act of the director saying, ‘Oh I want it sort of sixteenth century but I want it today too’” (William Ivey Long). Concept such as these will lead the designer away from accuracy. Conversely, if the production concept emphasizes realism and “you’re doing it in the time period it’s written, you’ll need specifically what that is” (Teresa Snider-Stein). Or perhaps
the production concept may call for both reality and theatricality, which designers saw as shorthand for extravagance and exaggeration. Tracy Christensen acknowledged this when she explained:

You have to theatricalize things too and say, “Okay, yeah, men wore suits of this shape, but my suits are going to be hot pink on these guys” or whatever. You know, you have to lift it a little so that people get energized and excited. If it was totally realistic, it wouldn’t be very exciting.

When the production concept includes historical accuracy, the entire production team must commit to it. When Ann Hould-Ward spoke of Jenny Tiramani’s productions, she claimed that it “requires an entire philosophy of the entire group of people who are doing it to be based on that… At the Globe, historical accuracy must be held to such a high flag that everyone puts everything else at bay.” William Ivey Long observed, “they all passionately believe in this.” Ideally that is true for all production concepts, but it may be particularly important when undertaking historical accuracy. With every production, designers assess whether historical accuracy is applicable and will “support what is on that page, what this writer has written, and what the director is doing” in order to make “that story come to life” (Gregory Gale).

The scenic design. Another aesthetic component of a theatrical production that the costume designer must weigh when considering the applicability of historical accuracy is the set. The designers noted the tendency for the scenic design to be completed before the costume design has begun.

---

19 Technically set pieces are free standing units and scenery is a visual depiction of a location (McGreevy-Nichols, Scheff, & Sprague, 2005). However, the terms set and scenery are commonly used interchangeably to refer to anything onstage that is not a performer, light, or prop. The term set designer is accepted for the person who designs those elements, but scenic designer is preferred both in the literature (Brewster & Shafer, 2011; Gillette, 1992) and in practice (“United Scenic Artists,” 2015).
To the consternation of the other designers, the director often seems to want to have a lot of private time with the set designer to kind of develop the idea. And so I’m often not brought in until the set is pretty much done, which is very disconcerting. I mean, it’s not the way you're taught it’s going to be in school. (Jess Goldstein)

Because the set has usually been designed before costume designers start, managing the relationship between the costumes and set is regularly their responsibility. Much like the text, the realism of the set can greatly influence the applicability of historical accuracy.

Gregory Gale gave an example of a production with:

- a really hyper-realistic set that looked like a nineteenth century parlor room. Floor to ceiling portraits, large hand-woven rugs, big, heavy turn of the century ornate furniture, et cetera. And looking at that, I felt like the clothing should have a very realistic feel to go along with that. I wasn’t going to do, like, some musical comedy costume on that, in that atmosphere.

Amy Clark agreed that, “if your set is really realistic, it’s harder for the clothes to then be really abstract or to be really kind of fantasy, if they’re existing in a place that feels really real and logical.”

Designers found they matched the realism of a set with realistic and accurate costumes, but they also found that realism in costumes can be called for when the set is abstract. In fact, “maybe they need to be even more accurate if the set is abstract, so that you can tell the story” (Teresa Snider-Stein). Candice Donnelly offered a counterargument, though: “sometimes, it’s a strange, unexpected set, then I would use period costumes but not make them so accurate, sort of make them more like the fashion show version,” a term she defined as an opportunity to “be a little bit more liberal in my own input to the design. Try and be a little bit more inventive with it. Mix maybe some modern elements in there, stuff like that.”

Other issues besides the set’s comparative realism are important in evaluating the applicability of historical accuracy. Most of the designers paralleled Ann Hould-Ward when
she said, “I always do my color work on what [the scenic designer’s] color work is.” Given that color is an indicator of historical accuracy, if the set prohibits certain colors, the historical accuracy of the costume may be affected. Tracy Christensen agreed, explaining,  

I have to wait for the set designer... You know, the floor is going to be a specific color, the walls, all that stuff. And then I have to figure out how to make the people pull away from all of that so they don’t be floating heads.  

In instances such as these, historically accurate color choices may be sacrificed so performers can be visible within their surroundings.  

In addition to the style and color of the set, there are other scenic elements that could affect historical accuracy. Designers like Teresa Snider-Stein remarked on the floor:  

It depends if you’ve got, what the floor is, if the actors have to roll around on it or if they have to walk on it in high heels and if it's a rake, then it might. It might. You have to collaborate on door size if you’ve got panniers.  

The effect of the floor on shoe choice was mentioned several times. A raked stage, where the floor slopes upwards toward the back of the theater and away from the audience, can make it difficult for performers to walk, requiring shoes in which accuracy has been sacrificed. For historical accuracy to be successful, every set element must support it. By evaluating the scenic design, the production concept, the text, and the theatrical framework, designers can begin to determine if the production aesthetics encourage the applicability of historically accurate costumes.  

Cultural aesthetics. Production aesthetics do not exist on their own. They are conceived and presented within the context of a larger culture. As discussed previously, past periods can be linked to a distinct socially constructed beauty ideal. These ideals become so ingrained that it can be difficult to view any alternative in a positive light. The struggle to appreciate non-mainstream constructs of beauty is certainly present in the contemporary
culture and is faced by costume designers of historically set productions. The societal factors that influence the applicability of historical accuracy are thus termed cultural aesthetics.

The prevailing standards of beauty can hinder the acceptance of historical accuracy if the historical aesthetic is too divergent from that of the present. Designers gave many examples of periods that must be considered carefully because a historically accurate costume might not meet contemporary standards of beauty. Paloma Young specified the early nineteenth century as:

The Empire period, and the waistlines ended right underneath the bust and white dresses were super popular… It was supposed to look kind of natural, because we were coming out of a period that was very, very corseted in. But if you actually put that on a contemporary woman, it can sort of make her seem a little dumpy or, as I like to say, like a fat marshmallow.

Jess Goldstein agreed that some periods are more problematic than others; “it will be hard to do a tragedy in the mid-1600s because it, the clothes look kind of foolish because they’re so, they’re so outrageous.” These eras present beauty ideals that clash with contemporary ideals, resulting in designs that might be adjusted away from accuracy.

Functioning in conjunction with beauty ideals, another aspect of cultural aesthetics are the codes that aid in the interpretation of appearance messages. Because codes are culturally defined, their signification can change and often does. Designers frequently confront a historically accurate cultural code that demands a particular costume element that could be misinterpreted by a modern audience in possession of a different code. Anita Yavich drew comparisons of outward displays of sexuality, prohibited in many past eras:

You would flirt very differently in the nineteenth century than you would now, because you are covered from here to there [gestured from neck to feet]… whereas in America [today], it’s not like that. It’s like, “Hi, this is my cleavage and my little short dress …and I’m really hot.”
Conversely, certain historically accurate elements that were not considered provocative in the past are now nearly impossible to feature on a theatrical stage. For instance, “do we really have to have crotchless bloomers on our ladies? That may not be a good idea in a musical” (Gregory Gale).

The presentation of sexuality onstage, according to some designers, is an inherent facet of costume design even when it was not a part of a historically accurate appearance. Jess Goldstein was clear about his objectives: “I want the clothes to be pretty and I want them to be sexy and I want them to be very appealing to the audience.” Amy Clark gave an example of how contemporary beauty ideals extend to sexuality, even when no overt reference is intended:

We chose to do a pretty historically accurate maid’s costume and we ran a few previews in this costume and it looked beautiful on her. It looked right. It didn’t hug her body. It’s everything it would have been. And the producers … said, “You know, I just feel like it’s just covering a lot of her. You know, do we really, does it have to be that? Like, could we cheat here? Could it be short sleeves? Could it be shorter? Could it be tighter in her waist? Can we show some cleavage?” And it’s all those things that this uniform would never have ever been. And after really, really thinking about it … we agreed and said, “Okay, let’s take the idea of this costume and essentially, you know, sex it up a little bit.”

*Gender codes*, or the measures of what constitutes feminine or masculine, have also changed over time. Jess Goldstein pointed out, “When you look at upper class people in the Elizabeth I era, it’s very hard to do those men and those pumpkin breeches and make them look masculine. It’s a very effeminate looking period for men.” Candice Donnelly observed, “I mean, men did wear girdles and corsets and stuff, but I’ve never asked someone to do that.” If a historically accurate gender code conflicts with contemporary concepts of masculinity and femininity, historical accuracy might not be applicable.
According to the designers, the clash of changing beauty ideals and aesthetic codes is particularly conspicuous in the 1920s, an era they called “tricky,” “difficult,” and “controversial.” The 1920s female silhouette, they contended, is “unflattering,” “clunky,” and “terrible.” Paloma Young explained, “there was no waistline, or there was this super dropped waistline. And it’s not a particularly feminine shape and right now we’re living in a period where people do like to see, they consider a woman, you can see her waistline defined.” Sydney Maresca elaborated:

Suddenly in the 1920s, no one’s wearing corsets, like everything bounces. The sexy girl is called a flapper, it’s all about movement and freedom and being unrestricted. So these sack dresses are really sexy because you can really feel the body moving underneath. But we’re used to seeing bodies moving so that’s not sexy to us anymore, that’s not novel to us anymore. What’s sexy about every woman in a 1920s dress is, “Oh, yes, I can see where your curves are. You walked and the dress bounced against your butt? Ooh!” Ugh. That’s not novel to us anymore so that’s not conveying the sexy story that we want to convey… It’s a very boxy period and what was attractive and thrilling then – no corsets, boyish silhouettes, movement of flesh under fabric – often reads as frumpy, plump, or worse to a modern eye.

Paloma Young agreed that changed codes are problematic for this period:

If I did the totally accurate 1920s dress, and she walked into the Great Gatsby’s party and those people would have been socially primed to be like, “Oh my God, she just went and got that dress in Paris! She looks great.” But we’re socially primed to be like, “Oh, she looks a little fat because I can’t see her waist.”

As “hard” as the 1920s and other periods may make it to commit to historical accuracy, there are eras with beauty ideals that are similar to those of the contemporary culture. Tracy Christensen remarked on the early 1960s, the era “everybody’s now crazy about, with *Mad Men* and *Motown*, and everything becoming sort of like super slim.” Several designers noted another accessible period:

One of the easiest periods to work in is the eighteenth century because the men and women, just like everyone looks beautiful. It’s just a period that is so flattering to everybody, all body shapes, all heights of people, everything, all ages of people.
Everybody looks great in the 1700s. So that’s a lovely period to work in… it’s just a sexier period. (Jess Goldstein)

When a period’s aesthetics and its codes closely align with those of the contemporary culture, historical accuracy may be more applicable.

When determining the applicability of historical accuracy in terms of cultural aesthetics, there are two perspectives to consider. The first is the _taste of the designers_, themselves subject to the same standards of beauty they are evaluating. They are more likely to favor historical accuracy if the period aligns with contemporary beauty ideals and adheres to contemporary codes (“I don’t like seeing unattractive hair on somebody no matter what the period is” [Jess Goldstein]). Secondly, designers were concerned with the _viewpoint of the audience_. The fear is that historically accurate costumes that are too different from contemporary styles will alienate viewers. Some, like Paloma Young, argued for jettisoning truly unfamiliar elements, “if it’s big shoulders, if it’s super tight corsets, if it’s super high waist, things that make them feel too distant from contemporary beauty standards, that we are not able to see the character underneath those extreme details.” Designers must weigh each period in comparison to the present before moving forward. Thus factors associated with the aesthetics of the individual production together with the larger culture are considered when determining the applicability of historical accuracy.

**Attainability.** In addition to issues of applicability, designers must establish whether historical accuracy is attainable. This concept refers to the feasibility of achieving historical accuracy, primarily due to access to the resources that vary with each production. It can also refer to the likelihood that performers with historically accurate bodies will be or have been cast in the production.
**Resources.** Designers understood that historical accuracy requires ample resources because achieving it is labor intensive, time consuming, and expensive. *Labor* in costume design can include assistants and shoppers, as well as costume makers such as drapers, dyers, milliners, and shoemakers. When there is ample access to skilled labor, creating historically accurate costumes is more attainable.

If you have a tailor, you just make it the way you want it. And you say, “Look, here’s my research, here’s some historical stuff, here’s an amazing Edwardian video of a man walking down the street. Let’s make a suit just like that.” (Sydney Maresca) Anita Yavich commented on the rarity of labor with skills to create niche items when she described the reaction to historical military accessories that were made for a show: “They were all like, ‘where did you get those sword belts?’ It’s like, ‘They were made by the armory department.’ Like, ‘Excuse me?’” Linda Cho commented that the historically accurate costumes designed by Jenny Tiramani are rare: “We don't have the labor that went into it. We're not going to sew everything by hand. *Twelfth Night* … was able to do it that way, but nobody has that kind of luxury.”

*Time* is another resource that costume designers revealed could affect the design of a production. Creating historically accurate costumes is time consuming and customarily, “what we put on stage needs to be made much more quickly” (Paloma Young). Ann Hould-Ward agreed, noting a routine compromise: “I think sometimes we are, because of time constraints, we’re just, ‘It has to be this,’” revealing a tendency to settle for quick but less-than-ideal solutions. Jenny Tiramani would likely agree. When she recreated a sixteenth century men’s ensemble, she reported, “despite the apparent similarity of the doublet and hose… it took only a couple of days to make the reconstructed hose, whereas it took more than two weeks to make the doublet because so much sewing was involved” (Tiramani, 2015,
Therefore, “time is huge” when considering the attainability of historical accuracy (Anita Yavich).

Of course, financial resources can often counter inadequate resources of other types; “if you have a decent budget and you can actually build all of the things that you need to build, it’s really wonderful, you know. And you can make it look like a show, a complete show” (Candice Donnelly). Many of the designers lamented, without sufficient funds, “it’ll come down to availability and what’s available that season or what’s in style” (Linda Cho).

Tracy Christensen gave a specific example:

My biggest nemesis right now is spread collars. I hate them. I hate the way they look and they’re everywhere and you cannot just get a general point collar anymore, which you can use almost all the time to be in any period if you have to. And these spread collars are killing me. I hate them and they’re all over the place because that’s what popular right now but they do nothing for you before four years ago.

Designers observed that when a costume budget is large enough, the designer can have the costumes made, using financial resources to increase labor resources and to avoid issues of availability. Unfortunately, designers indicated, sufficient financial resources are unusual. Each and every one of them remembered instances of compromises they had to make because they simply could not afford their first choice. And “if you don’t have a lot of money, it’s hard to get those beautifully done, period costumes with super boned bodices and all of the correct piping and all of that” (Teresa Snider-Stein).

Sydney Maresca evaluated her experience with costume budgets and focused on one particular element of dress: “We can never have enough money for the fabric that’s correct. The correct fabric is very expensive…. We cannot afford hand-woven fabric…. I don’t have like $1,000 a yard to buy beautiful lace for the period.” Gregg Barnes concurred, “you may

---

20 In theatrical parlance, the act of constructing or making a costume is commonly referred to as “building” it.
fall in love with something. It’s $150 a yard, and you have 40.” In a published itemization, Jenny Tiramani (2015) explained how expensive historically accurate clothing could be: the shirt, hose, and doublet in a single sixteenth century man’s ensemble cost more than $6,500 in materials and labor; the fabric for the doublet alone was $95 per yard. The itemization excluded the shoes, garters, hat, belt, and necklace which were part of the design, and which would obviously add to the price. As Ann Roth stated plainly, “Stuff costs what it costs,” and without the necessary funding, historical accuracy cannot be attained.

In these ways, designers assess the production’s resources, the “people, time, and money, the things that you need to do anything” (Tracy Christensen), and then “balance your budget and your labor with what you can achieve” (Linda Cho). Based on consideration of the resources, the attainability of historical accuracy is determined. Constance Hoffman submitted, “If I know I can’t pull a period off well, I’m not going to try to approach it as an absolutely pure attempt.”

**The historically accurate body.** As significant as resources are in assessing the importance of historical accuracy in a costume design, they are not the only factor that can influence attainability. The bodies of the performers likely to be cast in the production may also affect the achievement of historical accuracy. This would be an indisputable issue when designing a children’s theater production, for instance. But adult performers offer other challenges. Contemporary female performers often have “literally 0% body fat. And of course it’s not proper, the ideal body, you just can’t squish anything around. There’s nothing to move” (Gregg Barnes), which makes it difficult to wear a corset properly. Male performers have “the giant shoulders and the little waists and they’re taller so, even if you find some great vintage pieces that you want to use, can’t use them” (Linda Cho). Ann
Hould-Ward elaborated on the connection between bodies and historical accuracy:

Is that a man in 1660? What was he, probably 5-foot-4 up to 5-foot-6, maybe? Now, we’re putting that on a 6-foot-2 to 6-foot-4 actor who might have a thigh the size that the waist was of the other guy… Unless you give me the 5-foot-6 body with the waist the size of a modern man’s thigh, I can’t give you historical accuracy.

This particular factor seems to be of greater concern in terms of dancers in musicals rather than actors in plays. When Jess Goldstein designed a production set in the 1940s “which was certainly a heavily shoulder-padded period for women, we didn’t put shoulder pads almost in anything. But these dancers, these young girls now have such buff bodies you don’t need the shoulder pad to do that.” Ann Hould-Ward agreed that “we have now built a modern male dancer and a modern female dancer that have no relationship whatsoever to what someone looked like in 1783.” She continued:

Give me a historically accurate body to put it on. He ain’t going to Gold’s Gym. But we’re putting [the costume] on that dancer who goes to Gold’s Gym, so it doesn’t look anything like what it looked in the period, especially in musicals.

Ann conceded that contemporary bodies had not deterred Jenny Tiramani from achieving historically accurate costumes, but noted that performers in Tiramani’s productions differed from those with whom she most often worked:

[At the Globe], they do the historical accuracy. They are the people who are actually doing it. It’s amazing and it’s really fun to see, and they do it on modern bodies. But a lot of the bodies they use are smaller bodies. They’re not putting it on our musical boys with their arms all pumped up and their necks thick and their chest all, you know. (Ann Hould-Ward)

Tiramani (2015) argued that “the theory that there is such a thing as a ‘modern body’ and that it is impossible to obtain historical silhouettes on people today is not borne out” (p. 396). She submitted “that the clothes themselves create the illusion of the ideal body and are used to accentuate the desired shapes” (p. 374). However, she also admitted that “it was considered
of vital importance to make the clothes for a living person who resembled” the physiques of
the historical era (p. 375).

Attainability refers to the possibility of achieving historical accuracy in costume
design and includes access to resources and the casting of performers with historically
accurate bodies. Though the body of the modern performer can make historically accurate
costumes difficult, designers do not automatically rule it out. Instead, they evaluate all of the
production factors to aid in their ultimate decision.

Performability. Of the production factors, applicability refers to the relevance of
historical accuracy for a particular production and attainability concerns its feasibility.
Performability involves the capacity of the costumes to be utilized in a live theatrical
performance. The costumes must support the movement of the performers and their level of
activity can undeniably affect historical accuracy. Designers can generally anticipate the
kinds of movements directors will have performers carry out on stage. In a musical, for
instance, designers know to expect dancing. From Paloma Young:

If we’re doing musical and they’re dancing, there might be some skirts that I love
about a particular period, but we can’t do them because they can’t dance in them. So I
have to, within a period, find the silhouettes and the shapes that are dance-able. And
if you’re in a period where sort of nothing is dance-able, you cheat it.

Cheating is a term used by more than a third of the designers. Paloma defined it as meaning
“what are the things that I can do, like adjust enough historical markers that you feel like
you’re in a period, but then you’re also not distracted by that period?” To Tracy Christensen,
it means to “step out of historical accuracy quite a bit with fabrication, fit, detail, etc.” Ann
Hould-Ward gave an example in terms of the performability of historically accurate
costumes: “You’re also making that [costume] out of stretch, which they didn’t even know
about, because that dancer’s got to be able to jump in the air.”
Plays, too, require movement, though perhaps it is not as robust as the tap dancing, back flips, and somersaults that designers frequently see in historically set musicals. Jenny Tiramani (2009) used historically accurate methods to facilitate movement by designing costumes with the “lacing under the arms for a lot more flexibility” that can be found in sixteenth-century men’s fencing doublets. Further, she fastened “pins through … the shoulder of the dress into the corset so that if [the performer] wants to move about or dance vigorously, the corset is going to help to keep the gown in place.”

However, as with everything else in the Globe’s productions, their movement and dancing in are historically accurate and appropriate to the era. Most of the designers noted that directors often instruct performers to behave inaccurately. William Ivey Long remembered a production in which a performer’s costumes had to be revised because the director, who requested and approved historically accurate costumes, complained:

“It hurts when she’s on the floor.” I said, “She’s on the floor crawling around?” Well she wouldn’t be. Of course it bites into her if it’s a boned bodice. “So why did you want period clothes if you’re going to have her on the floor?” She wouldn’t be crawling around on the floor… Either don’t do it or don’t want period clothes.

Several of the designers commented that, “an actor has to be able to put their hands up over their heads no matter what period you’re in, even though of course in many earlier periods, people couldn’t do that because they weren’t supposed to” (Jess Goldstein). Constance Hoffman expanded, “I’m going to need to figure out how to allow for that movement in the design, whereas a women in the 1840s of a certain class wouldn’t have felt it was proper to move her arms over her head.” Anita Yavich observed, “Nowadays … everybody has to be in cheerleading positions.” Designers must reflect on the performability of the costumes by determining if and to what extent the movement expected by the director and performers conflicts with what historically accurate clothing would allow.
The factors constituting the applicability, attainability, and performability of the production are thus considered by designers as the first stage of their approach to a historically set production. As Gregory Gale summarized:

I try to look at each production, what is the writing, what is the director, what theater is it being done in, what is this budget, what are we, how are we trying to do this? What is available for me to use? What assistants do I have? How am I going to make this happen? So I tend to try to take all these variables and be like, “Okay, now we need to make a play, what am I going to do?”

Constance Hoffman agreed: “I think of it as just looking at all of the parameters and getting a sense for what would succeed in a given situation. You know, you don’t go marching into a swamp wearing high heels.”

**Strategies for Incorporating Historical Accuracy**

A designer’s approach to a historically set production begins with analysis of the production factors, the “parameters” identified by Constance. Once the factors are understood, strategies for incorporating historical accuracy are employed. The strategies include incubation, research, role-playing, and historical manipulation (see Figure 5), each of which is often re-engaged in an iterative process that ends when the designs have been rendered and are ready for actualization. Data analysis revealed minor themes incorporated within the strategies of research (i.e., the use of textual, visual, and artifactual sources) and role-playing, which is used by designers to imagine the perspectives of others. In this case, the “others” are the characters, audience, director, and performers. The result of the use of these strategies is a unique costume design displaying a level of historical accuracy appropriate to the individual production.
Figure 5. Design strategies: Category, themes, and minor themes.

**Incubation.** Designers often pointed to the necessity of simply thinking. The production factors must have the opportunity to incubate in order to spur the designer’s imagination. At the start of the process, when the text has been read and the production concept conveyed, the designer can then “start dreaming” (William Ivey Long). Tracy Christensen explained, “there’s a ton of information to sit and ponder,” and Linda Cho said she appreciates time to “just sort of let it marinate in my head.” For creativity to flourish, time must be allotted for incubation.

**Research.** Following an initial incubation period, designers begin to research. Jess Goldstein recounted the beginning of his process: First, “I think a lot and … [then] I just look at a lot of pictures, and I start thinking like, ‘What is, how do I feel about the period?’” The other designers agreed with Jess’s approximation of the volume of his research. They all do “a lot”; the word “vast” was also used. The designers consider research the basis for creativity, a platform for exploration and imagination. As Tracy Christensen said, “even if it’s going to be totally outside the realm of reality, there has to be some foundation of research”; she deemed it to be “the genesis of the ideas.” Two designers described using research to “feed” themselves (Teresa Snider-Stein; Constance Hoffman). Not only do designers emphasize the importance of research, but their enjoyment of it as well. “Fun” was
a common word, and several claimed, like Gregory Gale did, that “I love research. I’m obsessed with research.” Constance Hoffman’s strategy at this stage is to research “as deeply as I can, as broadly as I can.”

Designers described research as a multi-stage process, commencing with the general and narrowing to more specialized topics. General research can include “as much information as possible – cultural, historical, religious, political, sociological, philosophical, on top of art history and costume history” (Anita Yavich). In fact, most agreed with Amy Clark that they “rarely start with the clothes specifically. It’ll kind of just be like the vibe and spirit of the time period, the place, the people.”

**Textual research.** Quite a bit of this initial research is done through textual sources. Constance Hoffman remarked that “there's actually an enormous amount of reading, about a period, about a writer, about a composer, about the world in which the piece is created, that I think is essential.” Even once clothing research has begun, reading is an integral technique of gathering costume information and inspiration. Susan Hilferty gave particular examples:

With a man’s suit, I would then go and read about it in a tailoring book, so I would understand what they were. I love catalogs from the period, because you’re reading, you can read about it, go, “Oh! When you bought this ready-to-wear ready-made suit, it comes with two pairs of pants! Oh, that’s interesting!” … Or even reading about, when you read about what Dior was doing, it makes you be in his place, and then therefore, understand what he was doing as a maker.

As Susan indicated, books and catalogs are essential sources for costume design research. The designers in this study loved books. They “collect” them; both Tracy Christensen and Candice Donnelly said they had “tons” of them. Linda Cho professed to “order at least five to 10 new books for every production.” Amy Clark explained her library:

Some of them are about fashion. Some of them are artists, some of them are about places. Some of them are uniforms. Some are, you know, women working through history, just all kinds of random, random stuff. Children’s books illustrations, all
kinds of stuff that are just kind of there to inspire a style or a color palette or, in fact, teach me something really specific about a time and a place. But I would say my library’s pretty vast and irregular in terms of what it actually is.

This last sentiment was echoed by virtually every designer and was evident from observation.

**Visual research.** Books were considered valuable tools because they are tactile. Designers uniformly “like visual resources that I can touch” (Teresa Snider-Stein). They want to handle their pictorial research, arranging it and rearranging it to spur creativity. They also relish that the images inside books have “been edited and curated and presented in an adjacency. Adjacent to other pictures, so I already like that point of view” (William Ivey Long). The lone dissenter was Gregg Barnes:

> I’m getting rid of all my books because Pinterest is so much better. You know how you have your favorite book? Say it’s got 700 pages. There are four that are the reason that you love the book. And I thought I can put these four images in my Pinterest bank. And everything in there, I’ve edited just by selecting it in some way, and so the book is redundant.

For pictorial research, the Internet was both lauded and lamented. Some, like Ann Hould-Ward, appreciated that “it can open other avenues that we might not have found,” and they recommended photography websites like Corbis, Photofest, and Flickr. Others “find that a lot of really specific interesting research is not online and you can find it in these period books and magazines, because they’re so few of them that exist” (Gregory Gale). All of the designers used the Internet in one way or another, but several cautioned that, in searching for one subject at a time, “you cannot truly browse” the way it can be done “by just picking up a book and going through it and putting things together” in the imagination (Susan Hilferty).

Many of the designers celebrated the New York Public Library Picture Collection, a vast resource of more than a million images classified and sorted into thousands of subject headings (“New York,” 2016), and “one of New York City’s real special treasures” (Sydney
Maresca). Interestingly, Paloma Young argued against the Picture Collection for much the same reason others condemned researching on the Internet, which she herself appreciates:

> You’re sort of at the mercy of someone else picking out things that they think match your query. And at this point, the Internet has sort of become that photo collection, but is much faster and much more accessible.

**Artifactual research.** In addition to textual and visual sources, the third major source of research for historically set productions is artifacts, especially the surviving garments of the period. As Susan Hilferty proclaimed, “if you can put your hands on the clothes, there’s nothing better.” Artifacts provide a connection to the overarching narrative of culture, but also to actual people, living and working in the past. Constance Hoffman professed,

> I’m incredibly moved by extant garments and moved by historical craft, by the sense of what the hands could do and what the mind was doing. When I’m looking at an old garment, I’m often very touched by the human contact with the past.

Material culture also offers an opportunity to recognize how garments have changed in terms of silhouettes, and textiles, “the way the light reflects off the fabric, how I imagine it moving” (Teresa Snider-Stein). Gregg Barnes described being able “to see the wear and the lightness of construction and to get a sense of the magic of textiles as they were used in different periods and the folks that wore them and the artists that made them.”

Designers used specific garments as examples in describing how examining material culture would benefit a costume designer. Susan Hilferty discussed a Victorian man’s suit:

> Some of the putting your hands on it is comparing. You putting it on like, “Oh, this is this!” And now I’m going to put it on a modern suit and go, “Oh! This is so different, they don’t feel anything alike.” You are looking at it and comparing, “Oh, this is the difference between the notch. This is difference.” You’re also seeing the similarities. You’re thinking, “Oh, these tailoring things are basically the same in this time period and that time period.”

> When I put my hands on it, I’m also comparing it to, for instance, the pattern. So I look at it, and then I look at a man’s suit pattern from that time period. Because there is how many millions of suits that were built in 1900. So if you only have your hands
on one, you’re only getting the clue of the one. And once you’ve handled it enough, you’ll start to know, “Oh, this is probably a rich man’s suit,” or “this was a poor man’s suit.”

Anita Yavich remembered a visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute where she was confronted with the artifacts of two distinct historical eras, and how the differences in the garments suggested the differences in the cultures. She recalled:

We went behind the scenes, and I remember when the curator opened the eighteenth century closet, your heart just want to jump out, because the colors are so light and you feel this joy just gushing. Then after that, we opened the drawers from the nineteenth century and it was like, “What happened to all these colors?” They were all muted and dark and it’s like everything is so serious and morose and melancholy. It’s such a different like, you go from mid-1700s to mid-1800s. Big change. Very big change in the psyche.

However, Paloma Young again disagreed with the other designers. She was not convinced of the value of material culture for theatrical costume design because of the constraints inherent in the theatrical framework.

Structurally, we’re like, “This is what a Victorian 1880s dress would be.” We’re also going to need to add gussets under the sleeves and she needs to get out of it in 30 seconds, so we need to do a zipper instead of all these little tiny hooks and eyes or little buttons. So there’s only so much that I can be inspired by the structure of these historical garments. I’ve never felt like I need to touch or go to the Met and check out – like someone would bring you a dress, you look at it – I never felt that I needed to do that for a show. But that’s for the theater. If I were doing a film piece, where someone was getting dressed on stage, I would absolutely go to a costume collection and see every minutia of like, “How did this dress close, what did the inside of the dress look like?”

While Paloma does not visit historic clothing collections, she admitted that she “loves those kinds of books” that show “well-documented up-close pictures of the different buttons and threads, and you could see absolutely down to the smallest detail,” indicating that she sees at least some significance in material culture for theater.

In fact, all of the designers discussed their use of material culture, textual sources, and visual images as a three-pronged strategy of research for a historically set production, a
strategy that was revisited continually. Sydney Maresca observed, “There is always new information. It’s like something that I haven’t thought of is always being revealed from some amazing image or garment or text,” thus illustrating the iterative nature of the research strategy. Similarly, the incubation strategy was often re-employed as the focus of research tapers from general to specific. Several designers remarked on “a kind of meditation that takes place for me as I organize and reorganize research” (Constance Hoffman). After sufficient incubation and research, “when you come to the point of feeling comfortable that you’re well-rooted in the period, in the place, in the time, politically speaking, everything else” (Gregory Gale), designers progress to the role-playing strategy, the next stage in the approach to historically set productions.

**Role-playing.** Role-playing, or role-taking as Mead (1934) called it, is “placing one’s self in the attitude of the other” (p. 89). Analysis of the data showed that designers approached historically set productions by anticipating the attitudes of others, and used those conjectures to guide their decisions about costumes. This role-playing was both explicit, as when designers acknowledged imagining themselves in various different positions, and implicit, as when they professed to know what others wanted, which they could only do by imagining their perspectives.

**The characters.** The first role designers stepped into was that of the characters for whom they were designing. Some designers overtly discussed the process, as with Teresa Snider-Stein, who said, “I like to play all the roles, which you get to do when you’re designing, and research all the roles, and then live all the roles.” Sydney Maresca elaborated:

I’m a character, for example, who do I think I am? What did I, in the morning when I woke up, what did I think I was going to be doing that day? How do I want people to see me? What is my position in the world? What is my status?
Ann Roth identified more questions she asks herself when assuming the role of a character:

What kind of clothes she would wear, where she bought them, what she paid for them, how she found them, who washes them, who irons them? How many times a week does she wash her hair? Where are those clothes when she goes to bed at night? What does she care about?

Amy Clark implicitly described the role-playing strategy when she claimed to understand “the overall spirit of what this character wanted to be.”

*The audience.* Role-playing extended to the audience as well, as designers recounted imagining themselves as observers of the production. Designers knew that “whenever somebody, anything is put on stage, people are going to read into it. People are going to read into the meaning” (Anita Yavich), so they placed themselves in the position of the audience to attempt to deduce what their conclusions might be. Some, like Tracy Christensen, began by creating a parallel first exposure to the production:

With any production, the first step is reading the play and reading it like you’re seeing it. So you read the first act, you go to the bathroom. You read the second act and then you’re done or you go to the bathroom, and you read the third act. I feel like that’s a really important thing, as opposed to reading a couple pages on the subway and then on the toilet and then, you know, when you’re waiting for the doctor or whenever. Like, to experience it like you’re seeing it.

Designers then visualize what the audience expects and wants. The designers believed that “audiences really love shows that are set in period. They don’t really want to see things, what are period shows set in modern clothes. I think they find it just more visually interesting if it’s set in the period” (Jess Goldstein). While the designers uniformly felt audiences enjoy looking at historical costumes, they did not agree on the audience’s perception of accuracy. Some, like Jess, argued, “I think to the audience, they probably thought they were looking at period clothes, but it was really not the period at all.” Ann Hould-Ward suspected, “I think that a long skirt to most people means it’s oldy-timey.” Paloma Young agreed:
Your audience in general has no idea. Well, they have AN idea. But that idea has been filtered through like, they saw *Bonnie and Clyde* in the 70s that was about the 20s and 30s, and so their idea of what the 20s and 30s is has been filtered through many, many different lenses.

These designers believed that to facilitate a meaningful connection with the audience, they must “make it easier for the audience to understand who these people are” (Linda Cho). Jess Goldstein explained that he has started to approach historically set productions by thinking “about people in their 20s seeing this period for the first time. How do you make it look attractive to them?” Conversely, other designers cautioned, “Don’t ever underestimate the audience” (Ann Roth) because “an audience can feel when something is on the nose or if it’s not” (Gregory Gale).

Regardless of their view of historical accuracy, several designers explicitly placed themselves in the role of audience, attempting to evaluate their costume choices as “if I just walked in the theater” (Gregory Gale). Sydney Maresca was clear about her role-playing:

> I’m designing as if I’m in the audience and I don’t know anything about the show. What would I be delighted to see? Surprised by? Moved by? What would I need to see onstage to understand the story and the characters?

However, Susan Hilferty declared that role-playing as the audience was not a useful strategy because “I think talking about the audience, really knowing what an audience wants is impossible, so I try never to go there.” With no empirical research about audience perceptions of theatrical costumes, Susan is ultimately correct, but most of the designers anticipated audience responses nonetheless.

**The director.** In addition to the characters and the audience, designers indicated that they assume the attitude of the director as part of their approach to historically set productions. Many commented that “the way people might have acted, moved, and spoken historically might not be the way the director wants. Usually they want an immediacy and
intimacy with the audience” (Teresa Snider-Stein). They agreed with Gregory Gale that “directors just don’t like it when you get into those really freaky period details,” and that they discarded some historically accurate elements to appease the director’s anticipated response. Interestingly, Sydney Maresca believed “the director is kind of a stand-in for the audience’s reaction,” so for her, role-playing as the director is role-playing as the audience as well.

The performers. Further, the performers’ anticipated responses were considered as designers took on their roles. Anita Yavich asserted, “I think that a very good costume designer is someone who can also think like the actors because we’re kind of, you’re one. You have to merge, you have to meld together into one.” Ann Hould-Ward described the expectations she believed performers have: “They want to look nice in it, because historical, they’re usually thinking they’re going to look, you know, fancy pants. They’re going to look good. But they really, really want to know that they can move in it.” Designers described abandoning the very idea of tightly cinched corsets, or historically accurate armseyes to avoid negative reactions they assumed would be forthcoming from performers.

The strategy of role-playing is linked to incubation and can often spur the need for new research. By taking the role of character, audience, director, and performer, designers advance their understanding of the production’s parameters in preparation for the next and last strategy in their approach to historically set productions, historical manipulation.

Historical manipulation. Historical manipulation is the strategy by which costume designers create a design inspired by, but not identical to, examples found in the historical research. To manipulate is to “take an original form and to change it, to alter it. It’s to craft, to change the look of” the source material (Constance Hoffman). The designers agreed that every costume design is manipulated to some degree. Even in a production purporting to be
historically accurate, certain design elements are manipulated, because the designer is selecting which historically accurate elements to include. For instance, “we’re going to do historical costumes, but this scene, everybody is in blue” (Teresa Snider-Stein). A historically accurate “dress would have existed in that time period or that color but you’re sort of controlling all the things that are happening together” (Paloma Young). Gregg Barnes described it as “almost like you’ve had an operation and you’ve taken the reality, which is vast, and you’ve said ‘I’m using this 40 percent slice.’” Gregory Gale agreed that every costume is manipulated “in some way, by the fabrics you’re choosing, the way something is fit, the way something’s being cut. So even as period-correct as you may be, it is, in the end, a stage costume, so there’s a balance there.”

For more extreme versions of manipulation, designers recommended incorporating inspiration from a variety of subjects, but only if they support the applicability production factors (e.g., the text, the production concept, and the scenic design). Linda Cho proposed a production in which there might be “perhaps something animalistic about these characters. I might research a bunch of animals that I can integrate, or those ideas into the – or flowers, or some other element that I’ll layer on top of” historical research. Other designers discussed combining historical and contemporary elements to create a manipulated design. Gregg Barnes described his process:

I always think, “Do you gear it towards something closer to the reality, to the historical reality, or do you gear it closer to the modern aesthetic?” And if I go closer to a modern aesthetic, I don’t use anywhere near as many details from the get-go and vice versa.

This procedure is what costume scholars (Cunningham, 1989; Gillette, 1992; Russell, 1985) called stylization. However, more than half of the designers repudiated that term, calling it “bad” and “negative.” To them, the term signifies “making something up” (Susan
Hilferty) because of “less than thorough research” (Sydney Maresca). To these stakeholders in the Aristotelian theatrical model, honoring the creation of an authentic world, the term stylization indicates artifice. As Ann Roth exclaimed, when asked how she would respond to a director asking for stylized costumes, “That’s a dumb word! I mean, it is. I would say, ‘Huh? What are you talking about?’ I would like it to be stylized? ‘You mean not real?’”

Besides manipulation, other terms used by designers to refer to this strategy were extrapolation, theatricalization, and distortion. Designers referred to riffing on, morphing, tweaking, and taking liberties with the historical research. No matter the word they chose, they all agreed with Amy Clark:

In order to manipulate anything, you have to understand what it was in its origin and in its first existence. And then I feel like you can go away from it, you come back to it, but that there should be a deep understanding of the how and why something existed before you can tear it apart or build on it.

In reiterating the importance of proficiency in historical accuracy, the designers often noted the iterative nature of the process. When reaching the stage of historical manipulation, if the designer has reached an impasse and “can’t figure it out… then I go, ‘Oh, I need more research.’ And then I have to go do more research and then I can come back and sketch” (Teresa Snider-Stein). Sometimes that additional research is historical in nature, and other times it focuses on alternate inspirations, elements that are not historically accurate but that aid in the development of a manipulated design.

As Teresa noted, for most designers historical manipulation is developed through costume renderings. Ultimately, designers produce an illustration of each costume as a tool to communicate their ideas to directors, performers, and costume manufacturers. In addition, the designers in this study found that they solidify their thoughts about costumes when drawing, making this activity valuable to their own process as well. Susan Hilferty explained,
“I love to draw, and I love getting to the final sketches, but the real reason I draw is to be able to explore ideas.” Amy Clark agreed, “I really do try to solve it on paper. And when I can solve it on paper, it’s a lot easier for me to then make a decision and trust that I solved it on paper for a reason.” As Anita Yavich observed, “drawings don’t lie when you design. If your drawing looks [wrong], it means something is really not working and you’re forcing it.” Costume renderings are the primary method by which designers manipulate historical and inspirational research.

Thus historical manipulation is the final strategy of a costume designer’s approach to a historically set production, an approach that begins with consideration of the many production factors and incorporates incubation, research, and role-playing (see Figure 6). Based on these copious influences and inspirations, designers manipulate historical accuracy to the degree best suited to the individual production. Through data analysis, the degree of historical accuracy was determined to be highly variable and specific to each production. It became clear that a historically set production’s costume design would be situated along a continuum, being closer to or farther from an artifact’s reproduction. This continuum of historical accuracy is further discussed in the next section.

**Historical Accuracy Continuum**

Through analysis of the designers’ responses, a definition of historical accuracy in costume design was established:

> A historically accurate costume is one in which historically accurate articles made using historically accurate materials and processes are assembled about a historically accurate body.

That definition implies that historical accuracy is a binary proposition that is either achieved or it is not. However, the designers in this study do not view costume design in that light.
Instead, designers examine and manipulate historical research to create costumes that incorporate historical accuracy to varying extents. This concept is illustrated by the continuum in Figure 7.

The two endpoints of the historical accuracy continuum are artifact and invention. As Linda Cho explained, “there’s extremes of how much that original piece [of research] was used as inspiration. [The costume] might have been an obvious homage to that piece. It might just be very tangentially referenced.” A designer committed to the historical research Linda cited may attempt to faithfully recreate the artifacts found there. Conversely, a designer may attempt to ignore the historical research and entirely invent new modes of appearance. A

---

**Figure 6.** The production factors and design strategies that comprise the costume design approach to a historically set production.
design that blends artifact and invention will be found on the continuum somewhere between the two endpoints.

Figure 7. The continuum of historical accuracy for the costume design of a historically set production.

According to the designers, in reality, neither perfect artifact nor pure invention is possible. True historical accuracy cannot be achieved due to several reasons. Designers pointed to the lack of some historical resources, such as “certain kinds of felting done on hats made the milliners go crazy which is why we had mad hatters. We don’t want to have crazy milliners” (Paloma Young). Another issue is the change in body shapes, because modern performers “work out and are muscular, muscular thighs and things, and so historically accurate patterns don’t fit those bodies” (Teresa Snider-Stein). Many designers also recognized the contemporary lens that can alter the very perception of accuracy:

The brilliant Twelfth Night … it was Elizabethan, capital E. If you look at that in 10 years, you’ll say, “That was that brilliant 2015-style production.” We can't escape it. It’s something about how we see proportion and that kind of thing. (Gregg Barnes)

Even Jenny Tiramani, who designed that Twelfth Night using materials, patterns, and practices original to the sixteenth century, admitted, “Of course it can never be 100% accurate without a time machine” (personal communication, February 22, 2016).

At the other extreme, genuine invention is regarded as equally impossible. Several designers used the phrase “There’s nothing new” to support their argument that complete originality in costumes for historically set productions cannot be accomplished. As Amy
Clark observed, “even things that are rooted in complete fantasy are at their core something historically, you know, from history at some point.” Susan Hilferty agreed, “If you’re inventing a world, no matter, you have to start with primary research.”

When historical accuracy is not supported by the production factors, designers still begin with historical research and then devise original ideas inspired from the source material. Amy Clark described her process of manipulating historical research: “With the proper understanding of all of it, you can really figure out ways to move it around, to keep it malleable enough that you can get what you need out of it, but stay responsible enough to history.” It is this “malleability” of historical research within the theatrical costume design context that permits a design to include elements of the designer’s invention. The location of a production’s design between artifact and invention on the historical accuracy continuum will be determined by the degree of manipulation implemented after the consideration of the production factors and the employment of the other design strategies.

**Designer Factors**

The production is not the only entity guiding the costume design’s degree of historical accuracy. The designer’s personal perspective, previously mentioned briefly when discussing the importance of historical accuracy, directs their entire decision-making process. Through education, practice, and philosophy, costume designers develop their own inclination towards historical accuracy and that guides their consideration of production factors and their implementation of the design strategies. In other words, designers who appreciate historical accuracy more are more disposed to attempt it. For instance, Candice Donnelly remarked, “I usually try to make it as accurate as possible.” Amy Clark declared that “I strive pretty hard for it to be accurate because I really think it helps support the time
and place of the story that you’re telling. And I think it just lends itself to a more concise, beautiful production.” Sydney Maresca and Ann Hould-Ward both commented that they “aim for it” even while admitting historical accuracy is an impossibility. Several designers used the word “magical” to describe productions for which attempting accuracy aided in the success of a production, like Gregg Barnes who promised skeptical performers that, once they were fully dressed, “you’ll see that there's a magic to the proportion of” the sixteenth century silhouette.

Others were less committed to the concept. Constance Hoffman would rather “think of it more as using time and using history as a reference, as a jumping off point,” and Linda Cho, echoing the word choice found in the costume literature, said, “I think when you become a slave to historical, to what you think was true, it can get a little boring.” Susan Hilferty values the two viewpoints:

The historical accuracy is what I use as the basis, and sometimes I hold onto it as if I can make it as real as possible. And then there are times that I just use it as a place to a start, but then move away from.

Through analysis of the designers’ words, it is evident that their personal attitude towards the value of historical accuracy affects the final result of their approach to a historically set production. The point of view appears to be dependent on the individual designer; there were no meaningful differences when comparing across genders, generations, or ethnicities. Each designer had a slightly different perception of historical accuracy in costume design, ranging from “If you’re doing something that’s set period, I say bring it on. It can’t go too far, as far as I’m concerned” (Gregory Gale) to “I’m not sure that I have that interest. I like that I get to interpret history and make it my own that’s right for the piece” (Linda Cho). While the degree of artifact or invention present in a costume design will be
actualized through the design strategies particular to the production, it will be highly shaped by the designer’s encompassing perspective. In the next chapter, a model will be introduced to illustrate this process, established theories of appearance will be applied to provide context for the results of this study, a substantive theory of historical accuracy in costume design will be offered, and cases of designers’ productions will demonstrate the application of the theory.
CHAPTER FIVE: MODEL AND DISCUSSION

Conceptual Model

Based on the knowledge gained from analysis of interviews with Broadway costume designers, and resulting from the selective coding stage of the grounded theory method, a model was developed to illustrate the findings concerning the costume design approach to a historically set production (see Figure 8). As Fiske (1990) observed:

The value of a model is that (a) it highlights systematically selected features of its territory, (b) it points to selected interrelationships between these features, and (c) the system behind the selection in (a) and (b) provides a definition and delineation of the territory being modeled. (p. 37)

This study’s model of the costume design approach encapsulates what the data analysis revealed about the categories, themes, minor themes, and subthemes that made up the factors influencing historical accuracy, the strategies costume designers utilize to approach a historically set production, and the results of such an approach.

Conceptually, the model displays the sequential nature of the costume design process as a whole, while demonstrating the iteration applicable to certain stages. The costume designer’s approach to a historically set production is influenced both by the designer’s inclination towards historical accuracy and the production factors, or the theater piece’s externally imposed parameters (see Figure 4). In fact, the first stage of the costume design approach is an explicit consideration of the production factors. However, the designer’s inclination may remain implicit and unexplored, even as it affects the production’s end result.

The model presents consideration of production factors as leading to the implementation of four design strategies (see Figure 5). The first is incubation, when
Figure 8. Model of the costume designer’s approach to a historically set production.
designers allow production factors time to prompt ideas about how best to communicate themes and messages to the audience. Second, costume designers research the historical period of the production, using textual, visual, and artifactual sources. They conduct research about non-historical subjects as well, to provide supplementary information and inspiration. The model demonstrates the iterative nature of these strategies process by indicating a return to incubation at this point.

When costume designers are confident in their ideas and research, they move to the third stage, role-playing, in which they imagine themselves in the positions of character, audience, director, and performer. Each role contributes conceptions and perspectives of the production’s costumes. Role-playing, too, can precipitate additional incubation and research. The fourth stage is historical manipulation, when designers adapt the historical research to best suit the particular production. The amount of manipulation and relative commitment to research may require more incubation, research, and role-playing, all of which are influenced by the production factors and the designer’s inclination. Should new production factors emerge, such as a change in the budget or a reimagined production concept, the entire approach will need to be reviewed and potentially revised.

Once completed, the approach results in a costume design with a level of adherence to accuracy which can be situated on a continuum of accuracy, with artifact at one endpoint and invention at the other (see Figure 7). Interestingly, Strauss (2001), in his examination of “dress authenticity” in Civil War reenacting, also developed a continuum, “a spectrum from the flawlessly authentic to [uniforms] devoid of historical basis” (p. 150). Strauss too defined “flawlessly authentic” as “representing the past exactly, the height of perfection” (p. 150) and its location at one endpoint of his continuum echoes the artifact in this study’s historical
accuracy continuum. The Strauss model identified the opposite extreme as the complete lack of historical referents. This is similar to the parallel endpoint of the costume design continuum, but not identical, because in the theatrical context, if historical research is discarded, other inspirations are embraced, resulting in an invented style.

Unlike Strauss’s (2001) conception of dress authenticity, in theater, accuracy is not dichotomous. Historical accuracy is not always the objective for costume designers as it is for Civil War reenactors who “glorify the reproduction of period material culture” (p. 149). Those who do not adhere to historical practices are deemed inferior, whereas costume designers all agreed that inaccurate costumes are legitimately desirable in many instances. Designers incorporate history into the costume design of a historically set production after a multi-stage process that develops a unique design for each production. By graphically displaying the factors, strategies and results in a designer’s approach to a historically set production, this model offers insight into a creative process rarely systematically examined.

Theoretical Implications

To locate costume design within the broader academic landscape, several theoretical perspectives were explored. The results of this study showed that the use of dramaturgy, symbolic interactionism, and semiotics were supported in explicating the communication of appearance through historical costume design.

Dramaturgy

In The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Goffman (1959) described a perspective he called dramaturgy, adopting theatrical terminology as a metaphor for life’s interactions. This metaphor, if re-applied to the theatrical context, can help to explain a designer’s
approach to historically set productions, especially in terms of the process he named

*impression management.*

Goffman (1959) defined impression management as the communicator’s act of attempting to regulate and control the information presented in order to guide “the audience’s” opinions towards an intended response. Despite Goffman’s intention to apply this to life off stage, it is actually a fitting definition of costume design, the difference being the number of participants in communication. Goffman’s interactions involved two parties, the communicator and the audience, though he did note that this dynamic was true only to life and not to the theater, where there would be three parties, two characters speaking to each other and an observing audience.

But characters do not clothe themselves or decide how to move or speak. In actuality, there are at least five parties engaged in any theatrical interaction. Certain aspects of the character’s *personal front*, an individual’s visual aspects, are determined by the director in casting (i.e., “sex, age, and racial characteristics” [Goffman, 1959, p. 24]) and in staging (i.e., “posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures, and the like” [Goffman, 1959, p. 24]). Other components used to define a character in time and space (i.e., “insignia of office or rank; clothing” [Goffman, 1959, p. 24]) are the responsibility of the costume designers. The director and the costume designer, while not performing for the audience, act in place of the performer to “define the situation for those who observe the performance” (Goffman, 1959, p. 22), and together establish the level of historical accuracy within a production. The costume designer must employ impression management by selecting costume choices and appearance cues for other people in order to best “tell the story.”
To manage the audience’s impressions most effectively, Goffman identified several activities that costume designers also complete using the strategies of the design approach illustrated in the model (see Figure 5). For instance, a designer engaging the approach to a historically set production will develop costumes made up of “signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure” (Goffman, 1959, p. 30), a process Goffman called \textit{dramatic realization}. This can be achieved only through \textit{dramaturgical loyalty}, the commitment of all collaborators to the same reality— in theater, a reality devised through the text and production concept. Goffman, like the designers, worried about alienating the audience, jarring them from the experience of the interaction. He discussed the need for “performers” to maintain \textit{expressive control} to ensure that every element will “convey either no impression or an impression that is compatible and consistent with the over-all definition of the situation that is being fostered” (Goffman, 1959, p. 51). In this case, designers strive to maintain expressive control over the personal front of literal performers, again acting as an outside party where in real life, there are only two.

Goffman (1959) warned against allowing audiences to see a “discordant event” (p. 52), much as designers feared the reaction when “something feels wrong” (Constance Hoffman). Costume designers and Goffman each believed that when an inaccuracy is noticed, the “audience cannot help but be startled from a proper degree of involvement in the interaction” (Goffman, 1959, p. 52). He cautioned that “even sympathetic audiences can be momentarily disturbed, shocked, and weakened in their faith by the discovery of a picayune discrepancy in the impressions presented to them” (Goffman, 1959, p. 51). In theater, this is a problem because “then you’ve stopped the progress of the story” (Ann Roth). The goal in interactions on and off stage is what Goffman called \textit{expressive coherence}, the unity of
vision that creates both a controlled situation in life and a consistent theatrical world that “looks like it belongs together on the same stage” (Linda Cho). If *dramaturgical circumspection*, when “the members of the team exercise foresight and design in determining in advance how best to stage a show” (Goffman, 1959, p. 218), is attained, then a performance can avoid “expressions that might discredit the impression being fostered” (Goffman, 1959, p. 66). Costume designers engage in impression management for characters, utilizing dramaturgical loyalty and circumspection in order to achieve expressive coherence and dramatic realization. By executing these activities described by Goffman, the designer will create costumes situated on the historical accuracy continuum at a location appropriate to the specific production.

In fact, Goffman (1959) submitted that the dramaturgical intention to “guide and control the responses made by the others present” is an objective of theater-makers on the stage and non-stage performers in everyday life (p. 4). To achieve impression management, theater-makers utilize “the same techniques by which everyday persons sustain their real social situations” (Goffman, 1959, p. 255). This study shows that designers, in their guise as one of the performers in a theatrical interaction, implement the same activities Goffman ascribes to individuals, the careful selection and display of expressive equipment to communicate desired messages. The designers interviewed seemed to agree with Goffman that theater has indeed provided “an apt terminology for the interactional tasks that all of us share” (p. 255).

**Symbolic Interactionism**

Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical perspective offers a paradigm for the entire process of costume design for historically set productions, but symbolic interactionism is valuable in
framing one stage of the designer’s approach to historically set productions, the *role-playing* strategy. Symbolic interactionism posits that communication is achieved through symbols, the meaning of which are determined through memories of social transactions that occurred in the past, experiences of those occurring in the present, and anticipation of those that will occur in the future. To develop their appearance, individuals attempt to imagine the thoughts and opinions of others in order to communicate more successfully. Costume designers employ this procedure as well, a strategy symbolic interactionists called role-taking, “placing one’s self in the attitude of the other” (Stone, 1962, p. 89).

In developing costumes for a historically set production, first designers position themselves in the place of the characters. Through appearance, they give characters *identity*, establishing “*what* and *where* the person is in social terms” and “cast[ing them] in the shape of a social object” (Stone, 1962, p. 93). In fact, several designers echoed this concept, such as Anita Yavich’s declaration that “costume design is really about identity” and Gregory Gale claimed that costume design is meant to “get these characters to have their own identity.” Symbolic interactionists contend that appearance is part of the process by which an individual creates a *self* or a *me*. For a historically set production, designers “see the world through these characters’ eyes” (Gregory Gale), and thus create a *self* living in another era and embodied not by themselves, but by another person.

Designers dress the self they have created in the body of the character while considering not only that character but the responses of “audience whose validating responses are essential to the establishment of our self” (Stone, 1962, p. 102). By taking the attitude of this “abstract community” (Blumer, 1969b, p. 13), or the “generalized other” identified by Mead (1934, p. 256), costume designers can “realize the significations or grasp
the meanings of the symbols or gestures” they ultimately use on stage (Mead, 1934, p. 141).
Viewing costume choices from the perspective of the audience is an attempt to “guarantee against non-sense,” or the absence of successful communication, by conforming to the audience’s anticipated responses (Stone, 1962, p. 89). Designers commented repeatedly on the need to reflect on the audience’s familiarity with historically accurate appearance cues before determining the level of invention to incorporate into their designs. As Jess Goldstein said, “Part of my job as a costume designer is manipulating period details to be more accessible, more easily understood and appealing, and possibly more intriguing to the average audience member.” Referring to individuals in the social realm but paralleling the costume design strategy of role-playing, Blumer (1969b) advised that when a “gesturer” forecasts the response of the “gestured-to,” “confusion or misunderstanding” can be mitigated and ineffective communication avoided (p. 9), exactly the intentions of designers considering the use of historical accuracy.

Designers regard their designs not just from the viewpoint of the generalized other of the audience, but also specific others, “discrete individuals” (Blumer, 1969b, p. 13) like the director and the performer. As Mead (1934) noted, the communicator “must know what everyone else is going to do in order to carry out his own play” (p. 151). In an interaction with multiple individuals, the communicator:

has to take all of these roles. They do not all have to be present in consciousness at the same time, but at some moments he has to have three or four individuals present in his own attitude. (Mead, 1934, p. 151)

By taking the roles of “the other individuals implicated with him in given social situations” (Mead, 1934, p. 141), the designer “checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms” the designs in an iterative and “formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments
for the guidance and formation of action” (Blumer, 1969b, p. 5). It is at this point that designers contemplate whether “directors worry that they’re taken out of the piece by period costumes” (Ann Hould-Ward) or if “performers really want a corset” (Tracy Christensen).

Mead (1934), the founder of symbolic interactionism, indicated the applicability of the theory to costume design by recognizing “the whole process depends on an identification of one’s self with the other” (p. 302). As Fisher (1978) said, “the communicator is, at once, an active participant in the communicative situation and an analytical observer of the process” (pp. 175-176). Though these scholars were referring to social interactions, their words resonate within the theatrical context. As suggested by symbolic interactionism, without role-playing, designers would have less success at communicating intended messages and eliciting intended responses.

Semiotics

As with dramaturgy and symbolic interactionism, semiotics can be a useful tool in explicating theatrical costume design, specifically its success at nonverbal communication. Communication is defined as “the production and exchange of meanings” (Fiske, 1990, p. 3), and like any arrangement of appearance, costumes certainly accomplish that (see Barnard, 2002; Barthes, 1972; Danesi, 2007). Tracy Christensen unconsciously echoed semioticians when she submitted, “costumes contribute the visual, you know, the major visual clues for the characters. They speak before anyone opens their mouth and anything comes out or before anyone moves and does anything.” The costume designers in this study accepted and promoted the tenets of semiotics without possessing the vocabulary to explicate the application of the theory to the field.
To more clearly illustrate the process of communication via costume design, Jakobson’s (1960) model was adapted (Figure 9). According to Chandler (2007), Jakobson’s representation of communication “constitutes a conceptual bridge between the two major semiotic traditions,” providing meaning to be determined through the Saussurean “system of relations within a code” as well as the Peircean “referential context” (p. 183). Thus Jakobson’s model illustrates semiotic communication. Jakobson proposed that an addresser transmits a message to an addressee through a particular form of contact. The message is interpreted via a code specific to the message’s context. In costume design, the role of the addresser is taken by the costume designer who addresses the audience with messages of character traits and production features within the theatrical framework. Appearance codes are used to interpret the costumes’ messages, the form of contact in this situation.

![Figure 9. Adaptation of Jakobson's (1960) communication model to address the communication of theatrical costumes.](image)

In costume design, costume messages are established after careful consideration of the production’s text. The script or libretto is read multiple times for characterization, plot development, and literary motifs. Research is done to understand the context in which the text was written. In any form of communication, Scholes (1982) explained, a text can be interpreted because it is “open, incomplete, insufficient” (p. 15). It “must be must be understood as the product of a person or persons, at a given point in human history, in a
given form of discourse, taking its meanings from the interpretive gestures of individual readers” (Scholes, 1982, p. 16). Based on readings of the production’s text, the designer creates costumes that then become open texts themselves, vehicles for message transmission in their own right. Identifying aspects of visual culture as texts is very much within the purview of semioticians who “commonly refer to films, television and radio programmes, advertising posters and so on as ‘texts,’ and to ‘reading television’” (Chandler, 2007, p. 5). Sydney Maresca shared this viewpoint, saying that costume design “actually is something that in the same way that you read a historical newspaper and learn about time. Reading clothes and then re-telling stories with clothes is a really important part of our history and our culture.” Designers act as semioticians, interpreting linguistic signs from the production text and translating them into visual signs for the costumes.

Of course, because of the nonverbal nature of the messages being transmitted by costumes, accurate interpretation is not guaranteed, but according to semioticians, neither is it required. Viewers of costumes may decipher a range of meanings, but “those different readings [will not] be seen as evidence of communicative failure; they are only to be expected in the semiotic model” (Barnard, 2002, p. 32). Any interpretation at all, however, requires possession of a code, a system of collective, culturally defined rules that connect signs with meaning (Barnard, 2002; Fiske, 1990). Costumes for historically set productions communicate content by utilizing several sets of codes, some broadcast, or communal to a mass audience, and some narrowcast, aimed at a more limited group (Fiske, 1990).

Broadcast codes are widespread and accessible, and “rely on a shared communal experience” (Fiske, 1990, p. 76). One broadcast code that applies to historical costumes is the set of conventions that permit the mutual theatrical experience. An example is the code that
allows Western audiences and theater-makers to understand the meaning of applause or hisses. Similarly, theatrical codes provide context to elements of costume design that might otherwise be misunderstood. For instance, should the audience of a historically set production see a group of identical women onstage, it is doubtful they would assume women in the past all dressed the same. Instead, theatrical codes offer another interpretation, a connection between “everyone’s dressed alike” and “people breaking into song and doing a big tap number. There’s all these conventions that allow you to say, ‘Okay, here’s a 30s dress, but me and these girls are wearing a variation on a theme of one dress”’ (Tracy Christensen).

An audience can employ theatrical codes to decipher costume choices, and designers constantly invoke those codes, either intentionally or intuitively, when approaching historically set productions.

Additionally, costumes engage broadcast codes applicable to non-costume appearances. Color is interpreted through one such extensive broadcast code (see Barnard, 2002; Damhorst, 2005; Kaiser, 1997). The designers in this study all professed their use of color to convey character traits. Many agreed with Gregg Barnes that “color is the most important tool, because it’s emotional, and we bring associations to color.” Designers offered the ideas of using “a poison green color that’s going to tell you this woman is bad news” (Paloma Young), “a tight red dress” to illustrate a sexual woman (Teresa Snider-Stein), and blue for an ingénue character because:

It’s not a girly color but it’s a smart color and it’s a pretty blue. It’s clearly the right answer. When you think about it, you don’t want her in a brown dress and she can’t be in red, it’s too strong and pink is too girly and green seems a little odd, so what does that leave? Not purple, not yellow. So blue, you know, blue is clearly the answer. (Jess Goldstein)
Jess provided an instance that pertained to another broadcast code, that which associates sexuality and masculinity with certain materials and garments. He designed a historical production in which the men “were all in very tight leather breeches, and obviously, tight leather breeches are far sexier to the modern eye than tights…. And of course everybody finds knee-length boots to be sexy.” By selecting specific historical elements, he utilized codes shared by a mass audience to communicate traits of historical characters.

Yet character traits are not all that costumes serve to communicate. They are also tools in establishing the historical period, using specific elements to signify particular eras. Some garments and garment details are more widely known than others. For instance, skirts that reach the floor are out of the ordinary in the present; therefore, “long hemlines help” audiences “go into an era that precedes them” (Constance Hoffman). Teresa Snider-Stein was confident that Western audiences know “bell-bottoms scream 1970s and the drop waist is the 20s.” Other period indicators thought to be understood by a wide audience were pumpkin hose, poodle skirts, and miniskirts, as well as color: “Even just lay down a bunch of fabrics in the right colors, you would instantly evoke a period from people. They would look at it and go ‘Oh, the 70s’” (Tracy Christensen). Not all designers were confident an audience would be able to pinpoint a costume’s precise date, but garments like corsets and frock coats serve to suggest a more general “oldy-timesy” era (Teresa Snider-Stein).

To derive more detailed information from appearance cues, more specialized historical knowledge might be required. Signs such as these, with less widespread application, can be interpreted using narrowcast codes, based on “a common educational or intellectual experience,” (Fiske, 1990, p. 4). Subsequent to her assertion that some recognize only that a
garment is oldy-timesy, Teresa Snider-Stein noted that more detailed information can be derived by:

the definition of the waist … [which] in the 1800s, you know, at the empire waist and then the 1830s when it was higher, and then the 1840s it got lower. And then, the size of the skirt, the shape, the silhouette can all tell you something and it’s because fashion changes.

The fact of fashion change is exactly why narrowcast codes are held by a limited, rather than mass, audience, and can affect the degree of historical accuracy in a costume design. Because codes of all types are culturally defined, they often transform (Penn, 2000). A code can evolve from broadcast to narrowcast, causing a connection that was once generally known to become that requires “deliberate learning” (Chandler, 2007, p. 170). By definition, fewer people share a narrowcast code, which limits the impact of a message. Designers may decide a historically accurate costume will be understood by too few audience members and therefore sacrifice it.

Many of the designers explicitly expressed their concern that audience members might be too unaccustomed to historically accurate costumes to make sense of them. This concept was explored previously in terms of the applicability of historical accuracy and referred to changing appearance codes in relation to standards of beauty, sexuality, and gender. An example of the latter might be “I want this guy to seem more manly, but manly to my 2015 audience means something different than what it meant in 1876” (Paloma Young). Like Paloma, Constance Hoffman was not a designer committed to historical accuracy partially because “you can run the risk of it all feeling so artificial and removed that an audience can’t quite contact the performer.” Teresa Snider-Stein worried that historical costumes too exotic to modern eyes could “put up a wall where people can’t easily access it. People in ruffs and farthingales and all of that can be hard for people to relate to.”
While those living in a historical era would likely have been able to derive meaning from appearance cues that surrounded them on a daily basis, if codes have drastically changed between that era and the present, contemporary viewers may not have access to the knowledge they need. Chandler (2007) summarized this semiotic process: “Even within a culture, over historical time particular codes become increasingly less familiar, and as we look back at texts produced centuries ago we are struck by the strangeness of their codes” (p. 162). Designers apprehensive about excessive strangeness may be reluctant to attempt historical accuracy. Paloma Young clearly applied this concept to the decisions a designer must make about incorporating historical accuracy:

If we’re trying to say that if this costume is sultry, that this character is sultry and she’s wearing a sultry dress, but whatever it is that’s not what’s popular right now – Like, sultry in 1920 meant something different than sultry in 2015. If I was completely historically accurate, I failed in communicating this woman as a sultry woman.

Though the designers had different perceptions of the audience’s knowledge of historical appearance codes, most ultimately agreed with Teresa Snider-Stein, who said, “some people may not know the difference but there are a lot of people that do.”

Guided by their inclinations, designers perform the process illustrated in the design approach model (see Figure 8) to determine how much to adhere to historical accuracy and how many, if any, contemporary elements to adopt. When historical codes are too limited for mutual understanding, some designers may use contemporary elements to link contemporary codes to historical costumes. Not all designers assimilate contemporary elements in historical costumes, but those that do, hope that the combination of artifact and invention will “make those characters and their situation meaningful to a modern audience” (Jess Goldstein). They
believed that signs must be tailored to those who will interpret them in order to encourage successful communication.

No matter their stance on contemporary influences, through their acknowledgement of the need for audience understanding of appearance cues and their anxiety that historical accuracy “might look funny in that period to a contemporary eye” (Constance Hoffman), designers unconsciously incorporated the precepts of semiotics in their approach to historically set productions. In creating costumes that communicate historical period and character traits, designers synthesize aspects of semiotics, symbolic interactionism, and dramaturgy. These theoretical perspectives were supported by results of this study and help to explain the communicative properties not only of appearance, but costumes and historical costumes in particular. They provide valuable frameworks in understanding the use of costume design as a communication tool and the role of historical accuracy within it.

**Grounded Substantive Theory**

Semiotics, symbolic interactionism, and dramaturgy are theories, sets “of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena” (Straus & Corbin, 1998, p. 15). The grounded theory methodology draws a distinction between formal and substantive theories. The former, a title which has been applied to the three theories utilized to interpret the results of this study (e.g., Erickson, 2003; Hauser, 2010; Travers, 2001), is meant to “apply to a wider range of disciplinary concerns and problems” and is “derived from studying phenomena under a variety of conditions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 23).

A substantive theory is much more limited in scope, intended only “to speak specifically for the populations from which it was derived and to apply back to them”
(Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 267). The two are developed for their relevance either in “a formal, or conceptual, area of sociological inquiry” or “a substantive, or empirical, area of sociological inquiry” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 33). While substantive theories focus on the immediate situation under consideration, formal theories are used to understand multiple “diverse substantive areas” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 81). Development of a formal theory is unusual. Instead, grounded theory “researchers typically end their studies with a theory developed in selecting coding, a theory that might be viewed as a substantive, low-level theory” (Creswell, 2007, p. 65).

Indeed, based on the selective coding of this study’s data, a substantive theory of the process of incorporating historical accuracy into theatrical costume design was derived. The theory presents a set of systematically interrelated categories that explain a phenomenon, the degree of historical accuracy in a production’s costume design (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The substantive theory is as follows:

*The higher designer inclination towards historical accuracy and the more favorable the production factors (i.e., applicability, attainability, and performability), the closer costumes will be situated to artifact on the historical accuracy continuum* (see Figure 7).

This statement has the “four highly interrelated properties” required of a grounded theory according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the creators of the methodology (p. 237). The theory closely fits the substantive area in which it will be used, it is understandable by practitioners of the substantive area, it is general enough to apply to all historically set productions, and it allows the user “to have enough control in everyday situations to make its application worth trying” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 245). Its explanatory power can be demonstrated using the experiences of study participants, in particular, William Ivey Long’s design for *The Lost Colony*, Ann Roth’s design for *The Seagull*, and Anita Yavich’s design for *Henry V*.
William Ivey Long and *The Lost Colony*. *The Lost Colony* is about Sir Walter Raleigh’s 1587 attempt to establish the first permanent settlement in America, and is the country’s longest-running outdoor symphonic drama (“The Lost Colony,” 2016). Originally a WPA project, it opened in 1937 on Roanoke Island in North Carolina, and except for a hiatus during World War II, a cast of 80-100 has been performing it every summer since (“The Lost Colony,” 2016). Costume designer William Ivey Long has been involved with the production for quite some time: “I'm in my 44th season working with it. Started when I was eight. My parents started from the beginning, my father was from 1937.”

In 2007, a disastrous fire destroyed much of the stage and the entire costume stock. A director was hired to reconceptualize the production and William was brought on to redesign it. From the start, these two stakeholders were convinced of that historical accuracy would “make the whole thing much richer.” William’s own inclination towards historical accuracy supported the production concept:

Never underestimate the viewing audience. Even if they’re in shorts and suntan lotion, there can be some brilliant people. Even if they’re on Broadway with their sippy cups and t-shirts saying “I love New York,” they could have a master’s, PhD in something esoteric and they’re really getting it.

For this production, the applicability of historical accuracy was high, and because of the director’s commitment, the performability of historically accurate costumes was high as well. Attainability was made possible through assistance from a variety of sources. The state of North Carolina and the National Parks Service each donated $500,000, and HBO donated fabric from its *John Adams* miniseries (Smith, 2008). In addition, small groups held fundraisers, and private citizens gave money (Smith, 2008). William had the budget to build every costume piece, including the armor. He also had the time: “I spent an entire year. I gave a year of my life, I did nothing else.”
William conducted vast amounts of research when designing *The Lost Colony*. The production’s website observed that “museum portraits provided inspiration for the court of Elizabeth I, while the watercolors of Governor John White provided a first-hand look at the Carolina Algonquians and their environs” (“The Lost Colony,” 2016). In addition, William delved deeply into “the class systems subsequent from 1937 where they hadn’t done all that research. Since then, forty, fifty years, all sorts of new research has come up about lists and pecking orders, who was on which floor of the ship.”

To fully “superimpose this new knowledge of class structure,” William engaged in role-playing.

One of the reasons they almost died is, of the lost colony, of the 117 people who came, only forty were able to work because they were the servants. Everybody else was gentry, or leaders. So they’re not going to work, they’re not going to be doing these, they have to supervise. So forty people working for seventy-seven others. Well think about it. That’s an interesting thing.

Armed with knowledge and inspiration, William commenced historical manipulation. In fact, he manipulated as little as possible, having committed to historical accuracy. William explained his final results: “the fabrics were awfully close, awfully close, and of course we made these,” pointing to fabric samples. The colors too “were all based on research.” He designed the character of Sir Walter Raleigh by examining his portraits. The final costume was a copy of no single portrait but an amalgam. Comparing the final costume to a portrait from 1588, William noted, “you change the collar, you do change the little things, the slashing, [but] he’s wearing it in another portrait. [It’s] found in research.”

However, historical accuracy was sacrificed when designing the Native American characters. Both men and women were costumed in loincloths worn at the hips, and the women also wore midriff-baring halters and bandeaus. This conforms to the contemporary
standard of beauty that locates the waist well below the natural waist, but in “the John White drawings, see where, how high the waists are… It’s very high.” This adaptation was made to present costumes considered more attractive to contemporary eyes. Furthermore, William continued, in the research material “of course the women were all topless and we can’t quite do that.” Though not accurate, performers portraying Native American women covered their breasts to accommodate contemporary standards of propriety.

By using the model of a designer’s approach to a historically set production to trace William Ivey Long’s process in designing *The Lost Colony*, the costumes are identified as attaining a high degree of historical accuracy. William is very proud of this production, saying “it was really exciting” and “the closest” he had come to an ideal theatrical design experience. It is thus demonstrated that with high designer inclination and favorable production factors, *The Lost Colony*’s costumes, taken as a cohesive whole, were situated very near the artifact endpoint of the historical accuracy continuum, a conclusion that offers support to the substantive grounded theory derived from this study.

**Ann Roth and *The Seagull***. A counterpoint may also illustrate the application of the substantive theory. Ann Roth designed a production of *The Seagull*, set in 1895 on a Russian country estate. The production’s applicability and performability factors encouraged historical accuracy, but attainability was low. All resources were lacking: there was little time or money, and because of the production’s location, local market availability and labor were impaired as well. Solutions were found, but in the end, “it was really a bad experience because, in all honesty, a couple of people don’t look right at all.” Ann specifically pointed to several bodices that “were made overnight and I hated them. They got a little kitschy because the trimming got a little kitschy…. Monroe, New York – you ever been there? There was
nothing. I was just stymied up there.” In this case, though designer inclination and two of the production factors were favorable, inopportune attainability moved the design’s location on the continuum further from artifact toward invention, a result that was not desired.

**Anita Yavich and *Henry V.*** Because the designer’s personal inclination towards historical accuracy guides the consideration of production factors and employment of design strategies, a corollary, or a statement that was inferred from the presented substantive theory, was developed.

*The lower designer inclination towards historical accuracy, regardless of the production factors, the closer costumes will be situated to invention on the historical accuracy continuum* (see Figure 7).

Anita Yavich designed a production of Shakespeare’s *Henry V* that serves to illuminate this statement. *Henry V* depicts people who actually lived during events that really happened in the fifteenth century. The applicability of historical accuracy could certainly be supported. The resources for the production allowed all costumes to be built, but there were 52 roles and 11 actors, necessitating the frequent and rapid donning and removal of clothing. Anita recognizes that “respecting the past and understanding how it influences how we think today in the present [is] very important,” but she also believes that “costume design is about circumstances and behavior, as well. So if you don’t know what that is, the period or not period is secondary.” Her design for any production “has to come from the play and the approach of the play and then you get inspired to do all of these crazy things.” Her attitude towards historical accuracy is interested but not reverent.

For *Henry V*, Anita conducted much research, historical and otherwise. She then unequivocally manipulated the research; “you start with the period and then you take it apart.” What resulted was a design that purposefully incorporated artifact and invention together:
So, I thought, “okay I'm looking at this like a little bit medieval, but tunic still. Silhouette, tunic, doublet.” The idea of doublet, really kind of like motorcycle jacket back then, if they had motorcycles. And what if different parts can – my favorite toy was Lego. I was like, “What if these costumes are like Lego?” I can have a skirt longer or shorter, zip on, zip off. So I did a whole system of this, 52 people based on one thing but different parts can change or wrap or whatever, and all of a sudden, “Oh wow!”

In this case, even with high production factors, Anita’s lower inclination guided her costume design very near invention on the historical accuracy continuum, while still integrating a reference to the period. Her approach for this production was to “keep the silhouette, you keep the line, the frame, and then you fill it in with different content.”

As demonstrated here, experiences from designers in this study serve to illustrate the application of the substantive grounded theory of historical accuracy in costume design:

*The higher designer inclination towards historical accuracy and the more favorable the production factors (i.e., applicability, attainability, and performability), the closer costumes will be situated to artifact on the historical accuracy continuum.*

Though limited in scope, this theory offers a framework for understanding the phenomenon of the design of a historically set production and its resulting degree of historical accuracy. Both the historical accuracy theory and the design approach model resulted from the systematic examination of the creative costume design process and provide insight into a previously unexplored topic.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Millions of Americans see theatrical productions each year, every one of which displays performers clothed through some level of costume design. Nonetheless, costume design is little studied, existing in the literature primarily via the popular press. The purpose of this study is to systematically explore one aspect of costume design, the role of historical accuracy in American theater, according to contemporary Broadway costume designers. Using the grounded theory methodology, this study investigated: (a) the characteristics Broadway costume designers believe are essential for historical accuracy in costume design, (b) the significance they place on historical accuracy for the success of the costume design, and (c) how they approach and incorporate history into their costume designs of historically set productions. Based on the data analysis, an operational definition for historical accuracy in costume design was developed, and as was a model illustrating the designer’s approach to historically set productions, and a grounded substantive theory of the role of historical accuracy in costume design. In this chapter, a summary of the study will be provided, implications for the results will be identified, and areas for future research will be introduced.

Summary

Sixteen Broadway costume designers were interviewed for this study. Their ages and levels of career advancement varied greatly, and they were primarily women, as was expected when studying such a gendered field. The semi-structured interviews inquired into the designers’ backgrounds, their entrée into costume design, their perspectives of costume design in general and historically set productions in particular, and their perceptions of historical accuracy within the theatrical costume design context. Interview responses were analyzed utilizing the grounded theory method. Data were first coded with emerging themes,
then grouped into more abstract categories and subcategories, and then related to and integrated with each other, ultimately resulting in a visual model and substantive theory of historical accuracy in costume design.

To fully examine this research topic, the key term of historical accuracy needed a definition, as it was lacking in the literature. Therefore, based on grounded theory analysis, a definition of historical accuracy in costume design was generated:

*A historically accurate costume is one in which historically accurate articles made using historically accurate materials and processes are assembled about a historically accurate body.*

The definition’s development was guided by Hillestad’s (1980) model of the units, subunits, and elements of appearance (see Figure 2). Though not an anticipated framework, the Hillestad model was a valuable tool in classifying the many features of a historically accurate costume and formulating the final definition.

The costume designers interviewed for this study had many thoughts about historical accuracy in costume design (see Figure 3). Several points were widely acknowledged: (a) the presentation of history on stage is essential to theater’s mission of communicating with the audience; (b) the narrative takes precedence over historical accuracy; and (c) the importance of historical accuracy is conditional. Most contended that accuracy is a powerful device for creating an authentic world, and noted the responsibility they felt in presenting unfamiliar cultures to contemporary audiences. Virtually all of the designers appreciated that their own cultural perspective made achieving strict historical accuracy impossible, yet they still attempted it. Some believed that historical accuracy is relevant more often than others did, but almost all recognized that it is valuable for certain productions. Which are these productions? It depends.
The costume designers in this study identified many production factors upon which the commitment to historical accuracy depends. These factors were grouped into three classifications: applicability, attainability, and performability (see Figure 4). Applicability refers to the aesthetic relevance of historical accuracy. In other words, do the production’s aesthetics (i.e., the theatrical framework, the text, the production concept, and the scenic design) and the culture’s aesthetics (i.e., beauty ideals and cultural codes) cause historical accuracy to be applicable? Attainability encompasses the feasibility of achieving historical accuracy – is historical accuracy attainable given the production’s resources and access to historically accurate bodies? Performability asks if performers can move on stage as directed while wearing costumes that are historically accurate. All factors must support historical accuracy for it to be successfully accomplished.

The strictness by which the costume designer will choose to adhere to historical accuracy is determined after a series of strategies (see Figure 5), forming the design approach to historically set productions, seen in the model in Figure 8. These strategies are influenced not only by the production factors, external to the designer, but the designer’s own inclination with regards to historical accuracy, which may urge the design towards or away from historical accuracy regardless of the production factors. Both guide designers as they begin their design. For a historically set production, after consideration of the production factors, four design strategies are executed iteratively: idea incubation; textual, visual, and artifactual research; and role-playing as characters, audience, director, and performers. The final strategy is historical manipulation, adapting the research to create a unique costume design. This final result of the design approach can then be situated on a historical accuracy
continuum between artifact and invention (see Figure 7), its precise location dependent on the ultimate amount of each incorporated into the design.

Stemming from development of the model and further analysis of the data, a substantive grounded theory was derived. The theory and its corollary help in explaining the phenomenon assessed in this study, the role of historical accuracy in contemporary American costume design. They are:

*The higher designer inclination towards historical accuracy and the more favorable the production factors (i.e., applicability, attainability, and performability), the closer costumes will be situated to artifact on the historical accuracy continuum.*

*The lower designer inclination towards historical accuracy, regardless of the production factors, the closer costumes will be situated to invention on the historical accuracy continuum.*

Data contributed by participants about their experiences designing specific productions served to demonstrate the explanatory power of these statements. They provide a framework for evaluating the importance of historical accuracy for a historically set production.

The model and theory emerged from the study’s data, but existing theories were also useful in explaining results. The theatrical terminology that Goffman (1959) applied and adapted to social interactions was re-applied to theatrical costume design and offered a valuable perspective in understanding the costume designer’s impression management of a character’s personal front. Symbolic interactionism furnished the means by which to interpret the design strategy of role-playing in order to imagine the responses of fictional characters, the generalized other of the audience, and the distinct others of the director and performers. Lastly, semiotics illuminated the process of nonverbal communication that costume designers inherently accept but rarely explicitly explore.
Thus this research examined costume design using rigorous qualitative research methods to develop new conceptual paradigms and to position it within the larger academic landscape. Established theories were utilized to draw connections between apparel studies and the field of costume design in order to bridge these two disciplines, generally considered separate and discrete.

**Implications**

This study has implications for both the costume and apparel fields, as it contributes to the body of knowledge for each of the disciplines and forges connections between them. Systematic inquiry into the process of costume design allows implicit and unexplored experiences, perceptions, and activities to be analyzed for insights into creativity, as well as the practices that actualize it. Methodically evaluating this neglected subject fills a gap in the scholarship, broadens the reach of costume design as a field of interest for study, and extends academic research and theories common in appearance studies to forms of clothing not customarily recognized as part of the apparel field.

In addition to reconceptualizing costume design as a discipline worthy of academic research and drawing attention to it by using theoretical perspectives usually applied to more typical apparel studies, this study also produced practical applications. Data were used to develop a definition of historical accuracy of costume design, a model diagramming the costume design approach to a historically set production, and a substantive theory of the role of historical accuracy in costume design. These three outcomes offer a constructive framework for designers and scholars from which to explore costume design. They provide insight to theorists and support to practitioners embarking on the creative design process. In particular, they will be valuable in a costume design classroom as tools to guide novice
designers facing historically set productions. Designers who are uncertain about their approach to a historically set production can be shown how to plot their course of action using the stages of the model, and how to plan their choices based on the theory. Through these avenues, this research will be of interest to theorists, designers, and historians in both the costume and apparel disciplines.

Future Research

This research explored how contemporary Broadway costume designers approach historically set productions and, through analysis of interview responses, generated a grounded substantive theory and model of the role of historical accuracy in costume design. Because of the nature of qualitative research and the defined population under study, the transferability of these outcomes is limited. To more fully develop the outcomes and to make them applicable to different populations and context, additional research is needed.

There are many areas that recommend fruitful avenues for further study. This project concentrated on the Broadway costume designer’s approach to a historically set production, a process that reaches completion upon the creation of the production’s designs. Designs are usually illustrated through renderings, which allows their degree of historical accuracy to be evaluated and for them to be situated along the historical accuracy continuum. To evaluate the soundness of the present conclusions, future studies could focus on costume designers who work in primarily non-Broadway venues, such as regional theaters or in an academic context. Comparisons showing similarities would add to the validity of this study and those resulting in differences would increase understanding of the process.

Other opportunities for further study were suggested by the study’s participants themselves. Though the costume designers were trained and generally work within the
context of American theater, they speculated frequently about how designers outside of this frame of reference use historical accuracy. For instance, many of the designers were adamant that costumes for theater and film have different criteria, but few of them had significant film experience. Interviewing film designers about their perspectives and experiences with historical accuracy would help to assess the relevance of the model and theory of historical accuracy in relation to this context.

Designers also made numerous comments comparing perceived American priorities to those held by European – especially British – designers. Several believed that European designers paid sharper attention to historical details than their American counterparts. Others were of the opinion that European designers are more likely to manipulate historical research to a greater extent, that they are inclined to be “more adventurous than Americans” (Candice Donnelly). A study involving European designers would offer rich data for comparison. The future research proposed here would provide the opportunity to test the validity of the historical accuracy model and theory, and expand them further.

It is also important to note that the costuming process does not end with design renderings. Sketches are intended as representations of ideas that must be translated into actual garments. Future projects could examine the actualization of costumes from the page to the stage to determine if the conclusions presented in this study must be adapted or expanded to include unidentified factors or strategies, and if those factors or strategies influence the design’s ultimate degree of historical accuracy. This study could begin with Broadway designers and progress to the other designers identified here. Findings derived by exploring the perspectives of the current population in a different situation [i.e., the second half of the costuming process], and different populations in the current situation [i.e.,
regional, academic, film, or European designers], could spur the creation of a more general
theory of the role of historical accuracy in costume design.

These studies all concentrate on the perceptions of costume designers. Other theater-
makers who need to consider the appropriateness of historical accuracy include directors,
choreographers, performers, scenic designers, and lighting designers. It would be valuable to
determine how production factors they weigh and the strategies they employ align or diverge
with costume designers. Studies focusing on these populations would make the model
applicable in a wider range of theatrical classrooms.

In addition, in their interviews, every participant discussed the importance of
communicating with the audience and their apprehension that historical accuracy might
impede that communication. Much of the costume literature explored for this study offered
the same concerns. Yet no research has been done to determine what audiences actually think
about historical clothing. A study could be conducted in which theatergoers are interviewed
about their perceptions of historical costumes. Authentic images of people in various past
eras as well as photographs of theatrical costumes could be shown to encourage discussion.

An additional study investigating audience understanding presented itself during the
course of this research but its research methods would be designed very differently. The
studies suggested thus far are framed within the qualitative grounded theory methodology but
the suggested project would utilize quantitative procedures. Similar to impression formation
studies investigating appearance cues by using carefully developed stimuli, to measure
audience understanding of historical appearances, a controlled experiment could be
conducted. In this case, as for any other historically set production, a play would be selected,
a director would stage the performers, and a set would be designed. However, instead of only
one set of costumes, four would be created. Three would correspond to locations on the historical accuracy continuum: as historically accurate as possible, as invented as possible, and in the middle. The fourth set would be comprised of contemporary clothes. Audiences sampled to represent typical American theatergoers would be asked to watch performances of the production, identical except for the costumes. They would then complete a survey to measure their impressions of the characters, especially in terms of their appearance. Though insufficient to provide definitive answers, these studies would at least begin to address whether the degree of historical accuracy affects audience reception of information transmitted through costumes.

It is possible that the conclusions of the present study could apply beyond costume design, but to determine that, additional populations must be addressed. There are applied artists who might need to consider the appropriate degree of historical accuracy in their work, such as architects and interior designers who are tasked with expanding or renovating historical buildings. Other decorative artists for whom historical accuracy could be an issue include furniture makers and jewelry designers. These populations would undoubtedly need to recognize different factors and utilize different strategies, but the ultimate approach could be similar to the one illustrated in this study’s model. Future research could extend the substantive theory of historical accuracy in costume design to a more inclusive theory of historical accuracy in the arts. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) noted, a substantive theory at a limited conceptual level “may have important general implications and relevance, and become almost automatically a springboard or stepping stone to the development of a grounded formal theory” (p. 79).
The results of the study presented here provide insight into the creative costume design process and offer guidance to practitioners. The model and theory are limited and, like outcomes from any qualitative study, are not generalizable. Future research could expand the conclusions to relate to different populations facing different situations, thus expanding their explanatory power. Though previously unexamined in the academic literature, the role of historical accuracy in design – costume or otherwise – is a compelling issue with many potential applications.
APPENDIX A:
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL LETTER

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

To: Sara Jablon
31 MacKay

CC: Dr. Eulanda Sanders
31 MacKay

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Historical Accuracy in Costume Design: A Qualitative Analysis of the Experiences of Broadway Costume Designers

IRB ID: 15-302

Approval Date: 6/3/2015

Date for Continuing Review: 5/18/2017

Submission Type: New

Review Type: Full Committee

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.
- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.
- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. Approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.
APPENDIX B:
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Sent via email

Hello [potential participant],
My name is Sara Jablon and [key informant] gave me your email address as someone she thought might be interested in being part of a research project I’m working on. [Reminder of personal connection].

I am a costume designer with an MFA from NYU, and am currently getting my doctorate in Apparel, Merchandising, and Design. My research is part of my PhD dissertation. It combines the creative practice of costume design, historical fashion, and social theories of appearance, and is partially funded through a Fellowship through the United States Institute of Theatre Technology (USITT).

As theatrical costume designers, we often design shows set in past periods. Through my doctoral research, I have become interested in the role that historical accuracy plays in creative design. Because of your experience designing for Broadway, I would like to interview you about your experiences with historically set productions and how you approach and incorporate history into your designs for historically set productions.

To fully delve into this topic, I anticipate our interview lasting 1 to 2 hours. I would be glad to come to your studio or office if that would be convenient for you, or I will find a different quiet setting for us to talk. I am hoping to complete our interview in July or August, if you’ll be in New York then.

If you would prefer, steps will be taken to protect your confidentiality. However, I hope you’ll let me use your name. Your stature in the community will lend impact to my conclusions and linking your insights to your name will lend impact to my conclusions and will help to advance the field.

If you are interested in participating, please respond to this email or you can reach me at [redacted].

This study will be unique in how it examines the costume design process through the perceptions of contemporary designers and I hope you will participate in it! The study will be richer for your perspective.

Thanks so much! I look forward to hearing from you. And congratulations on [latest success]!

Best,
Sara Jablon
APPENDIX C:  
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

CONSENT FORM FOR HISTORICAL ACCURACY IN COSTUME DESIGN

This form describes a research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

Who is conducting this study?
This study is being conducted by Sara Jablon, PhD candidate; Department of Apparel, Events, and Hospitality Management at Iowa State University.

Why am I invited to participate in this study?
You are being asked to take part in this study because you are a Broadway costume designer. You should not participate if you are under age 18.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of Broadway costume designers in terms of their work with historically set productions.

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to share your thoughts, experiences, and opinions of historical accuracy in costume design as well as some of your general personal characteristics, like marital status, in an interview. You may also be asked to show or discuss pictures of your designs for historically set productions. If the interview is conducted in your workspace and if you agree, photographs of it will be taken.

Your participation will last approximately 1-2 hours and will be audio-recorded. Types of questions that you may be asked include, but are not limited to:

- What sources do you use for historical research?
- How much importance do you place on accuracy?
- How do you think audiences react to historical accuracy or inaccuracy?
- How does historical accuracy affect communication?

In addition, once data has been analyzed, you will be asked for feedback about the investigator’s findings and conclusions, a process called a member check. This will allow you to correct misinterpretations or fill omissions.

What are the possible risks or discomforts of my participation?
No names of people or organizations discussed in interviews will be reported in results, except yours, should you agree. However, despite steps taken to minimize this risk, there is
the possibility that something sensitive you say about a production or colleague might be attributable to you based on context. Following the interview, you will be provided with results and allowed to make corrections or remove any information that may be harmful to you or others.

**What are the possible benefits of my participation?**

You may not receive any direct benefit from taking part in this study. I hope that this study will lead to a better understanding of the design process to offer guidance to designers, theorists, and historians.

**How will the information I provide be used?**

Audio versions of your interview will not be shared with external parties. The information you provide will be transcribed, reviewed, and coded by the investigator and used to complete research for a doctoral dissertation, potential conference presentations, and potential publication. **If you agree, your name will be linked with your responses. If you prefer, your identity will be confidential.**

**What measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the data or to protect my privacy?**

Because of your stature in the community, I hope that you will allow me to use your name in the analysis of the data. If you prefer confidentiality, records identifying you will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable laws and regulations. Records will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the ISU Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies with human subjects) may inspect and/or copy study records for quality assurance and analysis. These records may contain private information.

If you prefer confidentiality, the following measures will be taken for published reports of the study:

- Your name will be known only to the study authors.
- You will be assigned or asked to choose a pseudonym.
- Other identifiers will be made vague (i.e., “a designer in her 40s” rather than “a 42-year-old designer”) or not included in reported results.
- Productions will be identified by era (“a show set in the 1920s”) rather than title.
- Any names or organizations you mention during the course of our interview will be substituted with titles (i.e., “a director” or “a producer”).
- Interview transcripts and the key code for your pseudonym will be kept in a password-protected file.
- Recordings of your interview will be destroyed within 3 years of the completion of the study.

The member check will allow you the opportunity to redact any information you consider too private or sensitive. However, despite steps taken to minimize this, it is possible that
someone familiar with the industry may be able to infer your identity based on a combination of information.

**Will I incur any costs from participating or will I be compensated?**

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**What are my rights as a human research participant?**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. If you permit your name to be linked with your answers, you may change your mind at any point, and confidentiality will be protected.

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

**Whom can I call if I have questions about the study?**

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For more information, please contact Sara Jablon, jsara@iastate.edu, or supervisor Eulanda Sanders, sanderse@iastate.edu.

**Consent and Authorization Provisions**

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, that your questions have been satisfactorily answered, that you have decided **whether to allow the use of your name in published reports**, and **whether to allow a photograph of your workspace**. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed) ___________________________ Date __________________

I allow the use of my name (Signature) I do not allow the use of my name (Signature)

I allow photographs of my workspace (Signature) I do not allow photographs of my workspace (Signature)
APPENDIX D:
FACE SHEET

Date of Interview: __________________________________________
Location: _____________________________________________________
Start time: ____________________________________________________
Participant name/code: __________________________________________

Demographic information:
Gender: _______________________________________________________
Year of birth: __________________________________________________
Ethnicity/race: _________________________________________________
Current zip code: _______________________________________________
Highest degree earned: __________________________________________
Number of Broadway shows/since: ________________________________
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Grand tour questions
We’re going to start with some general things about you:

• Can we start with some demographic questions?
  ○ Year of birth, current zip code, highest degree earned

• Can you tell me how you first began costume designing?

• Can you tell me about your first Broadway production?

General costumes
Now I want to take a little bit of a step back.

• What do you think is the primary purpose of costume design?

• What are other purposes of costumes? What do you want them to accomplish?

• What kinds of information do you think costumes communicate?

Approach to historically set productions
Let’s talk about historical costumes

• Can you talk about the importance of a show reflecting the period in which the production is set? Why isn’t everything set now?

• What costume elements communicate time period?

• When you design a historical production, what is your first step?

• What comes next?

• What sources do you use for historical research?

• Do you incorporate historical clothing into your research process?

• How do you incorporate research into the costume design at the sketch stage?

• At the construction stage? Acquisition?

• What other topics besides the fashions of a historical period do you research for a production?
• How do you decide when you’ve done enough research?

• What is the purpose of research?

• When you’re designing a historically set production, how much do you aim for accuracy?

• What are variables that affect your approach to historically set costume design? (set, budget…)

• How has your approach to historically set productions changed over time?

• How do you approach a production that is set in a past period other than the one in which it was written?

• How do you judge the historical accuracy of other costume designs?

**Historical accuracy in costume design**

To prepare for this project, I did a lot of research and read a lot of textbooks and all of them talk about historical accuracy, but none of them actually define it.

• How do you define historical accuracy?

• What has to be present in a costume for accuracy to occur?

• How do you use the word “stylized”? Can you define it?

• Is there a period or subject that you feel responsible about? That you’d be more accurate for than others?

• How does your design process differ when approaching periods you lived through vs. those you did not?

• Do you have a favorite period?

• Are there advantages to accuracy? Drawbacks?

• How does being historically accurate affect the communication of the costumes?

• How do performers react to accurate costumes?

• What do directors say about historical accuracy?

• How do you think audiences react to history onstage?
• How do you think audiences react to inaccuracies or anachronisms?

• With what aspects of costume design are you most likely to make compromises in terms of accuracy? Women and men?

• Least likely? Is there anything you’ll go down swinging for?

• Is it ever permissible to change the text? (If a character says, “Mabel I love your yellow dress,” will you automatically design a yellow dress?)

• Do the same considerations apply to the stage directions? (If the stage directions say “Mabel takes off her yellow dress,” …?)

• How do you approach “timeless”?

Summary questions
We’re nearing the end and I have a few final questions.

• How would the ideal design process for a historically set production go?

• What has been your favorite historically set production to design? Why?

• Is there a historical show you would like to design?

Final questions

• Is there anything else you’d like to add about costumes for historically set productions?

• Is there anything I didn’t ask about that you’d like me to know?

• Do you have any questions for me about the project?

• Is it ok if I email you with follow-up questions or for clarifications?
APPENDIX F:
CODING GUIDE

- Accuracy in costume design
  - Support for accuracy
    - Provides distance so audience can connect past/present
    - Look beautiful
    - Honors/respects period/subject
    - Provides authenticity/specificity to story
      - Lack of accuracy leads to vague/generic costumes
  - Comparisons between
    - Theater v film/TV
    - Europe v US
    - Musicals v plays
  - Critiques of accuracy
    - Accuracy is overwhelming/complicated/strange/distracting/distancing/silly/ irrelevant
    - Familiarity of contemporary is easy to understand
    - History is a burden/crutch
    - History is serious
    - History looks like a lifeless (dead) museum
    - Accuracy is impossible
      - Contemporary eye/lens won’t allow accuracy
  - Degrees of accuracy (continuum)
    - Museum piece (undesirable) – artifact
    - Invention – creating costume with no reference to anything
  - Personal aesthetic/POV/attitude toward accuracy

- Appearance
  - Elements & principles of design
    - Color / surface patterns
    - Shape
    - Silhouette
    - Proportion/scale
    - Line
  - Design lines and components (period indicators)
    - Bust
    - Fabrics/materials
    - Fit/Ease/Cut
    - Footwear/shoes
- Hairstyle/hats/wigs
- Hem/length
- Neckline/neck
- Shoulder
- Sleeve
- Undergarments
- Waist
- Closures
- Accumulation of details
- Cosmetics/makeup

  - Body
    - Body shape/size
    - Body motions/movement/posture
    - Body (skin, hair) color

- Compromise (internal negotiation) between accuracy and … (not based on actual collaboration but anticipated reactions
  - Attainability/availability/ affordability/budget/resources/time
  - Audience’s anticipated opinions/reactions/expectations (could be based on stereotypes)
  - Communication of character specificity
  - Construction/maintenance practicalities/requirements
  - Contemporary aesthetic (“making it look better”) – conformity to contemporary gender/beauty codes (THIS is masculine. THIS is fashionable)
  - Contemporary social mores (codes of respectability)
  - Durability
  - Performer’s (anticipated) appearance/body/size (fit)
  - Performer’s staging (movement, quick changes) – functionality/ physicality/safety
  - Production/design concept/tone
  - Requirements of text
  - Theatricality – stage conventions/codes/visibility from the stage/venue

- Costume design process
  - Data collection
    - Play analysis/reading/note-taking/character analysis/uncovering themes
    - Research for every show
      - Research organization/selection & compilation
    - Incubation/contemplation
    - Integrating new knowledge throughout process (iterative process)
  - Results of data collection and incubation
    - Stylization – manipulation of elements
    - Sketches/renderings/drawings
  - Flexibility of process – Lack of codified procedures (it depends)
• Creation of coherent/consistent/authentic/unified/“real” world (Aristotelian theater)
  o Emphasize theater-ness rather than presentation of reality (Brechtian techniques)
  o Collective vision of theater-makers for each production

• Evolution of (historical) appearance – men & women
  o Classic pieces in each period
  o Fashion icons of each period
  o Functionality of clothing pieces/clothing’s intended usage
  o Historical construction/patterns/processes
  o Fashion (of upper class) vs. clothing of everyone else
  o Ideal body shape of each period

• Nonverbal communication by the costumes to the audience
  o Of character traits/psychology
    ▪ Arc (how character changes throughout production)
    ▪ Situation
    ▪ Status – money, power, authority, rank
  o Of production’s period & place
  o Symbolic qualities of:
    ▪ Color
    ▪ Garments
    ▪ Materials

• Purpose of presenting history
  o Draw connection/parallels between past and present (Make past accessible to audience)
  o Highlight contradiction between past and present
  o Create foundation for storytellingGROUND story in reality
  o Present underrepresented groups/unreported stories

• Relative access to resources
  o Budget
  o Human resources (available labor)
  o Lack of resources
  o Location/proximity
  o Time

• Research
  o Visual
    ▪ Historical
    ▪ Inspirational (art, nature, architecture, random juxtapositions, etc.)
  o Textual Internet
  o Artifacts/Material culture
- Preference of print over digital sources (touch)
- Purpose of understanding research/knowing what would be accurate
- Begin general, then character/clothes

- Role-playing
  - Characters
  - Audience
  - Director
  - Performer
  - Relationship/conflict between performer and character
Appendix G: Participant Biographies

Since 1997, Gregg Barnes has designed 14 productions on Broadway. He has been nominated for six Tony Awards for Best Costume Design, winning for The Drowsy Chaperone (2006) and Follies (2012). He won the 1994 Irene Sharaff Young Master Award as “an early-career designer whose work has gone beyond mere beginner’s promise and has entered a period of fruition” (“TDF,” 2016). Four current Broadway productions feature Gregg’s costumes: Aladdin (2014), Kinky Boots (2013), Something Rotten! (2015), and Tuck Everlasting (2016).


Amy Clark has designed two productions on Broadway, Chaplin (2012) and A Night with Janis Joplin (2013). Additional information about Amy can be seen on her website at http://www.amyclarkdesign.com/.

In 2005, Tracy Christensen designed Souvenir on Broadway. She serves on the faculty of the SUNY Purchase undergraduate design program. For more about Tracy, see http://www.tracychristensen.com/.

Candice Donnelly has designed five Broadway productions since 1987, the most recent being Hughie (1996). In 2000, she was nominated for a Daytime Emmy Award for her costume design of All My Children. Additional information about Candice can be found on her website at http://candicedonnelly.com/about.html.

Since 1999, Gregory Gale has designed six Broadway productions. His costumes for Cyrano de Bergerac (2008) and Rock of Ages (2009) were nominated for Tony Awards. In 2002, with co-designer Jonathan Bixby, Gregory won the Irene Sharaff Young Master Award. Details about Gregory can be seen at http://www.gregorygale.com/.

---

21 The information in the designer biographies is current as of April 15, 2016.
**Jess Goldstein** has designed 41 productions on Broadway since 1980. He has been nominated for three Tony Awards, winning in 2005 for *The Rivals*. His designs can currently be seen on Broadway in *Jersey Boys* (2005). He serves on the faculty of the Yale School of Drama and was the 2015 recipient of the Irene Sharaff Award for Lifetime Achievement in Costume Design. For more about Jess, see his website at http://www.jess-goldstein.com/.

Since 1980, **Susan Hilferty** has designed 22 Broadway productions. She has earned four Tony Award nominations, and won for *Wicked* in 2004. Susan’s designs for *Wicked* can currently be seen on Broadway. She is the Chair of the graduate Department of Design for Stage and Film at New York University. Additional information about Susan can be found on her website at http://www.susanhilferty.com/.

**Constance Hoffman** has designed two productions on Broadway, *The Green Bird* (2000), for which she received a Tony Nomination for Best Costume Design, and *Old Times* (2015). She won the 2001 Irene Sharaff Young Master Award and is an associate professor in New York University’s graduate Department of Design for Stage and Film. More details about Constance can be seen at http://constancehoffman.com/.

**Ann Hould-Ward** has designed 21 Broadway productions since 1984, the most recent being *The Color Purple* (2015), currently running on Broadway. She has been nominated for three Tony Awards, winning for *Beauty and the Beast* (1994). Further information about Ann can be found on her website at http://www.annhouldward.com.

Since 1978, **William Ivey Long** has designed 71 Broadway productions. His first of 15 Tony Award nominations was in 1989. Of those, he won six times, for *Nine* (1982), *Crazy for You* (1992), *The Producers* (2001), *Hairspray* (2003), *Grey Gardens* (2007), and *Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Cinderella* (2013). Currently, his designs can be seen on Broadway in *Chicago* (1997) and *Disaster!* (2016). He was the recipient of the 2009 Irene Sharaff Award for Lifetime Achievement in Costume Design. More about William is can be found on his website at http://www.williamiveylong.com/.

**Sydney Maresca** designed *Hand to God* on Broadway in 2015. She is an assistant professor of costume design at Marymount Manhattan College. For additional information about Sydney, see her website at http://sydneym.com/.

In 2002, **Teresa Snider-Stein** designed *I’m Not Rappaport* on Broadway. She is the associate professor of costume design at Brooklyn College.
**Ann Roth** has designed 84 productions on Broadway since 1958. Her first of five Tony Award nominations for costume design came in 1976, with a win for *The Nance* (2013). She has also been nominated for four Academy Awards, winning in 1997 for *The English Patient*, and three Emmy Awards for Best Costumes in a Miniseries, Movie, or Special. Currently three Broadway productions feature her designs, *Blackbird* (2016), *Book of Mormon* (2011), and *Shuffle Along or the Making of the Musical Sensation of 1921 and All That Followed* (2016). Ann was the 2000 recipient of the Irene Sharaff Award for Lifetime Achievement in Costume Design.

**Anita Yavich** has designed four Broadway productions since 2003, most recently *Fool for Love* (2015). She is on the faculty of Princeton University’s undergraduate theater department and won the 2004 Irene Sharaff Young Master Award.

In 2012, **Paloma Young** designed *Peter and the Starcatcher* on Broadway, which won the Tony Award for Best Costume Design. Further information about Paloma can be found on her website at http://www.palomayoung.com/.
REFERENCES


